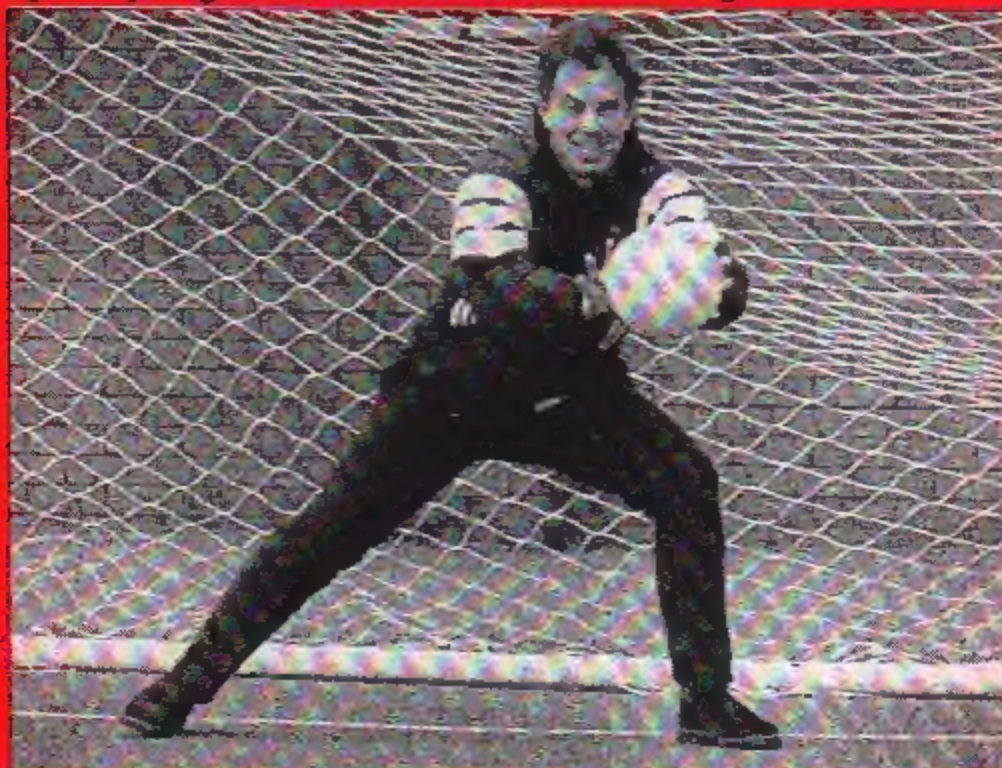


# ***Revolutionary Perspectives 4***

Quarterly Magazine of the Communist Workers Organisation



## **Labour - Capitalism's Last Line of Defence**

**Plus**

**The Capitalist Crisis and the Welfare State**

**Imperialist Rivalries**

**Unemployed Struggles**

**The "Peace Process" in the Middle East**

**Irish Nationalism and the Working Class**

**Leninism**

**Racism, Sexism and Communism**

**Revolutionary Perspectives**  
**Series 3 No.4 Autumn 1996**

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# Welfare State and Capitalist Crisis

## Welfarism and capitalism

**I**t is no accident that cuts in welfare are now happening over much of the advanced industrialised world. The present welfare states arose out of ruling class fears following World War II that workers would take a revolutionary route. There were massive strikes in Italy, France and Britain, mutinies in the British armed forces and a general fear that "communism" (by which they meant Stalinist state capitalism) was attracting the working class of Western Europe. The US already had its New Deal agencies and the European states now began to adopt versions of it. In different countries it went under different names. In Britain it was the welfare state which we were told would look after us "from the cradle to the grave" whilst in Germany it developed into the social market economy. For all countries it became one of the central planks of state capitalism - the direct and indirect intervention of the state in a nation's economy. It was this as well as state responsibility for "macroeconomic conditions" (through controlling credit, interest and exchange rates), rather than state ownership of utilities and production, that universally defined the tendency towards state capitalism in Western Europe and the USA.

The welfare state was not a step towards socialism as the Left (and the Right around Thatcher) of capital still maintains to this day, but a way to save the capitalist state. It belongs to, is run by and for our class enemy - the capitalist class. It is and has been a means to an end. The means has been to get the working class to pay out of its own wages for what we are told is a benefit of modern capitalism. The end has been to buy social peace in the workplace for the ruling class. It gave a false notion to workers that they are getting something from the system when in fact it was just another form of taxation.

## The Economic Crisis

However the welfare state was based on two assumptions. The first was that capitalism would be able to guarantee "full employment". The second was that the taxation returns of the present workforce would always be able to pay the pensions of retired workers. In the post-war

boom this was no problem. Unemployment levels in the advanced capitalist states was usually below 2%. In Britain it was considered a crisis in the 1950s and 1960s if unemployment rose to 400,000. But as the tendency for the rate of profit once again began to exert its effect, growth rates slowed down and economic conditions began to change. Britain, which had restructured less than most places after World War Two, began to feel the end of the post war boom earlier than other places. As firms tried to cut wages (in true Keynesian style by giving wage rises less than the rate of inflation) the workers responded. Individual workers at this time could tell management to stuff their jobs whilst collective action was usually successful since management did not have reserve army of labour to replace the thousands taking part in strikes. At this time strikes were called "the British disease" but the crisis spread to other states at the end of the 1960s. May 1968 in France led to the working class being bought off with a 10% wage increase and this was followed by the "hot autumn" in Italy.

The 70s largely saw the state continue earlier policies in attempting to ride out the storm of the crisis. At this point the response of the capitalist state was to increase state capitalist measures and extend the welfare state (e.g. in the USA, Johnson's "Great Society"). However the burden on the state became enormous. In Britain state spending reached 48% of GDP and the increases in taxation required to maintain this level of spending led to further demands for wage increases. The Government's attempts to print money to cover the fiscal deficit led to hyperinflation. This was the point in 1976 at which the then Prime Minister Callaghan told the Labour Party that they could not spend their way out of trouble. To try to save British capitalism the first cuts in social provisions (including the health service) were brought in. As *The Independent* put it

*Thus Britain under Labour was the first country in the developed world to start reducing the size of the state.*

8.9.96

Despite all these cuts and the many more blows which Thatcher's regime delivered in the 1980s the state has not been able to significantly reduce



its expenditure largely because real growth rates have fallen and unemployment levels have remained high (see tables on this page). Despite all the ways they devised to defraud the unemployed of benefits the actual numbers in most European countries has remained at around 10%. This why a new more brutal series of attacks on the unemployed is now necessary. This is what the 90s has to offer us. We are seeing a major restructuring of economies, privatisations, new finance measures, and finally the drastic cutting down of the welfare state.

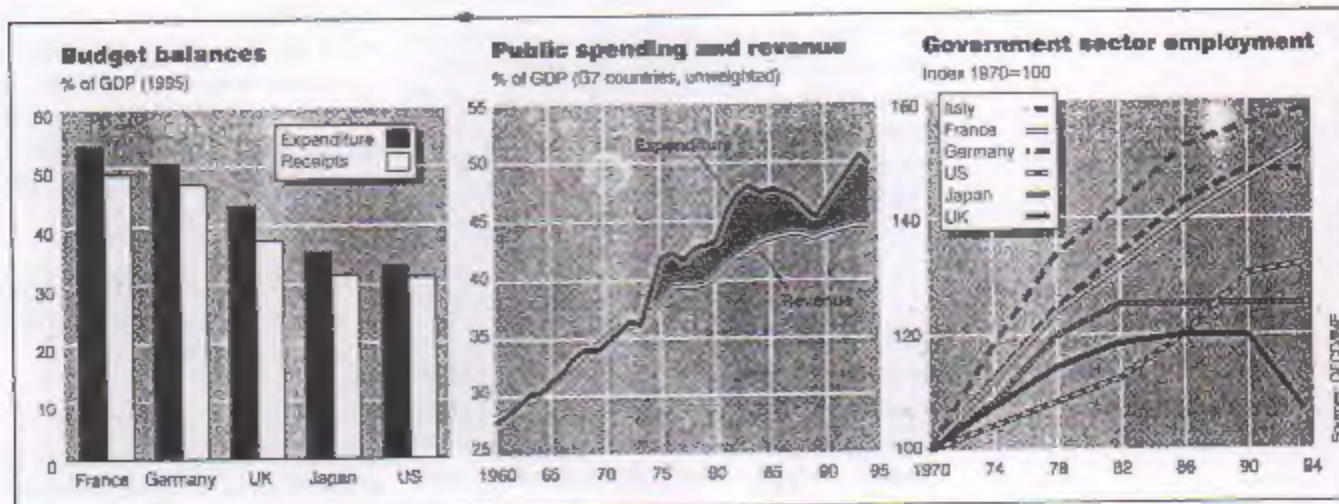
The current global need of the advanced capitalist states to cut welfare still further and attack the working class comes from the persistence of the current crisis itself. When Callaghan confessed that the British state could not spend its way out of trouble he was recognising a new factor. After 1945 individual states could largely determine their own destiny because they disposed of a bigger mass of capital than any which private capitals could hope to deploy. However the continuing process of centralisation and concentration of capital which had made the states themselves such powerful monopoly players did not stand still at this point in history. Slowly, inexorably capital accumulation created huge financial monopolies which actually began to hold a greater mass of liquid (and therefore easily moveable) capital than any state could hope to hold (with the possible exception of the USA). This is the heart of what we call "globalisation". With state-controlled capital largely held in fixed forms (often the constant capital of the basic economic infrastructure) they could not compete with velocity of turnover of capital which was needed to attempt to overcome the tendential fall in the rate of profit. The shift in balance between state and international finance capital began to favour the finance capitalists. States were no longer such independent arbiters of what went on inside their own territories. The thirst for capital meant an opening up of financial markets and the direct investment by

multinational corporations repatriating capital to their "own" countries. At first the US dominated in this field but today even the US has opened up to Japanese capital and Japanese car manufacturers. And countries which want to create a climate for investment have to balance their budgets and have low fiscal demands. Social spending has to be cut further. In short, as capital falters, workers have to be punished. States are now falling over each other in competition to see who can create the most attractive regime for this footloose capital.

The post-1945 idea where every state had to control its own steel and other infrastructural industry has been superseded. Privatisation and deregulation, and restructuring of basic industries all followed as states sought to grapple with the problems of recapitalisation at the end of the third great cycle of accumulation this century. However none of this has solved the fundamental economic crisis. The last hope before the ultimate "solution" of imperialist war is the further pauperisation of the working class. The CWO has been predicting for a number of years that there would have to be a global assault on the welfare provisions of the advanced capitalist world. The only reason why this assault has been largely postponed is that in every country the ruling class have feared the social consequences. Today, after a decade or more of retreat in working class struggles, the ruling class believes it has the opportunity to carry out this dangerous task. Each state has its own agenda.

### Germany

In Germany, the plans to reduce its welfare budget and reform its financial and state sectors have gone slightly awry as the planned for state sector pay freeze has been broken by huge workers' demonstrations and strikes and the upper house has rejected the plans. However these measures will be forced through presently in some form. Why is all of this happening?





In the first place the German economy is suffering, as we have noted in previous articles (*Revolutionary Perspectives* 3, *Germany the crisis bites*, and in *Workers Voice* 69). It now has to count the costs of absorbing the East and its adventures in eastern and central Europe (Deutsche Telekom was revealed as having a greater debt than that of Turkey, in the order of tens of billions, after taking over East Germany's telephonic system). Over the period 1991-5 the pattern of investment was as follows:

Inwards	DM36.2 billion
Outwards	DM155.8 billion

Its once successful industries have been bleeding workers onto the labour market - 4 million unemployed officially. German labour costs to employers, outside of wages, are 80-100% of wages. The pay bargaining structure is now moving away from its centralised form - of necessity, those firms smaller than the huge sector leaders simply can not afford those figures set under 'blanket' deals. The structure and capacity of the finance sector is changing. Once dominated by the huge Insurance and Banking institutions, German capital is now paying attention to the advantages and the profits to be gained in the 'esoteric' financial markets, to entrepreneurial trading along the lines of the City of London. Most significantly, though, the profitability of German enterprises is woefully inadequate to the task of being traded on the international markets(3).

Second, the German bourgeoisie aims to increase Germany's position as the dominant European economy, to ensure that dominance it must move with the current flow of the world economy. Its imperialist ambitions are centred around the strategy of the ERM. It aims to institutionalise the Mark as the base currency of a European economy totally dominated by the German economy, and create a German-led European bloc.

### France

As regards the so-called EU 'partnership', the French ruling class are the most eager to follow the Germans, creating a Franco-German axis for the EU. Hence, France has pursued the franc fort, the strong franc, plans to cut down its welfare budget and wholesale restructuring of the state sector, to comply with the ERM criteria. The slight set back of the December strikes last year has not prevented further plans by the Gaullist ministry to renew the onslaught (albeit more stealthily). However the recent fall in the value of the Franc can not have helped Prime Minister Juppé to sleep any easier as he embarks on his attempts to push through a further round of privatisations. Part of that seems possibly to

include a rushed privatisation of the crippled Crédit Lyonnais bank (now known as Debit Lyonnais), selling of around 25% of its capital to put beside its recent sale of MGM studios. These will offset likely losses of Fr 2-3 billion (£260-380 million) this year (to be set beside the Fr21 billion, £2.7 billion, losses of 1992-4)(2).

*France is living beyond its means and is not doing what must be done to adapt to a competitive world.... The difficulties of Air France and Crédit Lyonnais, the bottomless pit of social security and the SNCF, and the sad efforts to adapt the state-owned telecommunications company, France Télécom, are all harbingers of a serious crisis.*

*Guardian* 14th August 1996.

Germany is looking to cut its budget with respect to GNP and so meet those criteria. The problem for the EU as the centrepiece of a European bloc is that the various sections of the ruling class are competing for best advantage in the world economy rather than place themselves behind the dominant German economy. A unified European economy would be far greater in



weight than either the US or Japanese economies. Currently Germany has a bigger per capita share of world visible trade than either of the other two giant economies but the tensions of the competing interests of the European nation-states always contradicts the drive to create a continent-wide super-state.

### Fat Bill Thins Welfare

The attacks being prepared in Europe pale by comparison with what is being enacted in the USA. Measures have recently been announced reducing major US government welfare programmes such as Food Stamps, Women, Infants and Children (WIC) and Aid to Families with Dependant Children, in addition to the denial of any welfare provision for 'illegal' immigrants. Clinton's signing of the Welfare Reform Bill keeps his promise of 1992 to 'end welfare as we know it'. Most of the burden for welfare provision will be moved away from the federal budget to the various states. This is just a con trick. Many of those states have already indicated that they will provide little if any assistance. Single parents are going to be forced onto the labour market, where they will be faced with low-wage jobs which will not cover the costs of child-care and rent, let alone food (average child-care costs,



\$15 per hour). Few people realise that the US economy, the biggest in the world, the dominant world economy, relies on soup kitchens and schools to feed its poor. Wages have been falling in real terms for twenty years. Poverty is growing there, according to the National Commission on Children, 20% of the population live in a family below the poverty line, meaning 13 million children amongst 31 million people, many of these households having a working adult amongst them. As *Los Angeles Workers Voice* recently put it

*Corporate welfare for the rich is... at least \$250 billion a year.... The current Welfare Reform Bill will legally rob the poorest working class people of at least \$55 billion over the next 6 years. (4)*

American capital does not have to worry about the declining value of its currency, other people hold it in abundance, thus they foot the bill for the US debt. However, American industry has had to rely upon the imperialist status of the US, as the thug of the world economy, bullying its way into contracts, making threats about other countries trading with countries such as Cuba, Iran, Libya and Iraq, telling peripheral countries like India that they don't pay high enough wages and so on. All this is to guard its own markets and domestic industries. To make sure it pushes workers into grossly low-waged work wherever possible. The recent welfare cuts, have cut labour costs without creating jobs. The recent stock market falls on the backs of unemployment figures going below what is termed 'the preferable levels of around 6%' demonstrate that. The US attempts to safeguard its ailing industries by forcing through measures on the world stage, using threats with respect to its domestic markets and then bludgeoning its own workers with draconian welfare measures.

#### ***The Platform of the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party***

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#### ***Internationalist Notes***

in Farsi (write to either address for other Farsi pamphlets)

#### ***Prometeo***

Theoretical journal of the Internationalist Communist Party (Italy)

#### ***Battaglia Comunista***

Monthly paper of the PCInt (Italy)

The International Bureau also has publications in Bengali, Slovene, Czech, and Serbo-Croat. Please write to the (Milan address for all these publications)

*Their wisdom holds that the best way to nurture the present recovery is to administer pain... Corporate America has taken this approach: fire workers by the thousands and then apply the lash even more firmly to the fortunate few who remain.*

New York Times, 13th February 1994.

### **Capitalist Crisis**

Many advisors to the ruling class may think that this enduring crisis is merely a cyclical event, that there have been upturns, recoveries and mini-booms. They may look forward to a new period of generalised growth. The working class knows differently. The processes coming under the title - Globalisation - are one manifestation of the changes the capitalist crisis is bringing about. On a domestic level, the cutting of welfare payments and programmes, the move towards lower wages in many sectors of industry in the advanced metropolitan countries, are part and parcel of the self-same processes at work - the processes of capital trying to gain best advantage over competitors and to bolster market share and profitability. This crisis has now lasted a generation. It has no capitalist solution. Workers cannot keep their heads down and "wait for the upturn". Our only solution is to recognise our collective strength and begin the fightback. **Clare**

#### **Notes**

1. Wolfgang Streeck, Max Planck Institute: "Globalisation discriminates against modes of economic governance that require public intervention...it favours national systems like those in the US and Britain that historically relied less on public-political and more on private-contractual economic governance." *Guardian* 7th September 1996

2. A French analyst:

"The crazy deregulation which went on in the UK under Thatcherism, which France is still nowhere near and may never be, created an unbridled buyers' market." *Guardian* 13th August 1996. Other analysts have noted that the flotations of state-owned companies have not been successful, often domestic buyers, individual shareholders or business investors, and foreign investors have been very reluctant to take shares in such ailing companies. Recently privatised - Compagnie Générale Maritime, shipping, which has cost Fr 4 billion in aid.

Seita, tobacco, privatised February 1995, the only real success for the government. Renault, partially privatised in November 1994, share fallen by 34%, Usinor-Sacilor, steel, shares fallen by 24.4%.

3. Times, Lex:

"The problem is that while almost all German public companies now claim to espouse shareholder value, most have nothing more in mind than keeping their investors supplied with information and, hopefully, dividends."

(4) *Los Angeles Workers Voice* is a group made up of workers most of whom have recently split from Maoism. They are currently engaged in a work of political development but have already announced that they are on the political terrain of the communist left. A relevant leaflet of LAWV follows this article.

## **Other Publications**



# Unemployment: Incurable Curse of Capitalism

It speaks volumes about the priorities and ethical nature of this economic system when the spokespeople for that system such as politicians, economists and business people start complaining that it looks like "too many workers" may be getting jobs. The "problem", as they see it, is that unemployment "threatens" to drop below their preferred cold and calculated level of about 6%. And, according to capitalist logic, if too few people are unemployed this will put workers in a good position to demand higher wages. And this, we're supposed to gullibly believe, lead to that old nemesis, the wage-price spiral or "inflation". This is pure poppycock and balderdash!

Meanwhile a front page story in the *New York Times* (22.3.94) entitled, 'Job Extinction ... A Fact of Life in U.S.' comes a bit closer to reality as it approvingly reports that "American companies are prospering but announcements of job cuts this year are more numerous than ever." It is not hard to figure out why. Job-shedding has become the fashionable thing to do as corporations seek to maintain their profits. Their wisdom holds that the best way to nurture the present recovery is to administer pain ... Corporate America has taken this approach: "Fire workers by the thousands and then apply the lash even more firmly to the fortunate few who remain." (*N.Y. Times* 13.2.94)

Never mind that for the millions of unemployed people the loss of a job can mean untold pain and suffering through the loss of their home, health care, or retirement benefits, the break-up of the family and sometimes, even worse. No, the human and social misery unleashed by unemployment just does not factor into the capitalist equation of profit-making when they, as they unashamedly like to say, have to make the "hard decisions" to lay off hundreds or even thousands of workers.

On top of this, instead of demystifying and educating people about the ins and outs of this capitalist economy by explaining, for example, who really benefits and who rely

pays dearly for any given expenditure, what the various hirelings and apologists for the rich are set on doing is instilling in working people a sense of guilt and shared responsibility for this latest economic "downturn". (A closely guarded secret is the accompanying huge economic upturn enjoyed by the rich.) They want us to believe that somehow we have all had a hand in creating this "crisis", that everyone of us, rich or poor, are in the same boat, and should all, therefore, be willing to tighten our belts and sacrifice. But we are not all in the same boat. While some people luxuriate in their tax deductible yachts, others are frantically bailing the water out of their leaky row boats, while still others are doing what they can to tread water without any boat at all.

Just look at what a study cited in the *N.Y. Times* on 20.4.92 had to say about this: "The Federal Reserve and Internal Revenue Service states that by 1989 the richest 1% of households will have more wealth than the bottom 90%." Or how about this one: "The average pay for chief executive and 257 of the largest U.S. corporations was \$2.56 million in 1991. That is 139 times the average U.S. paycheck and is up from about 35 times the average worker's pay in 1973." (*N.Y. Times* 18.9.92)

*The only way that workers are ever going to put a stop to these vicious assaults against their standard of living is by organizing with their fellow workers, and this must be done across all color, gender and ethnic lines. Don't be misled by the divide and conquer schemes of the rich!*

**BREAK THE CONTRACT — Build the Movement!**

**WORKERS UNITE IN  
CLASS STRUGGLE!  
FOR WORLD SOCIALIST  
REVOLUTION!**

L.A. Workers' Voice, P.O. Box 57483, Los Angeles CA 90057

NB. We have removed some of the demands from the original version since LAWV now recognise that some of them were economicist - CWO.



# Labouring for Capitalism

The idea that Labour has just ditched "socialism" or the working class since Blair took over can only have credibility with those who have been peddling the illusion that Labour was socialist in the first place. This it never has been. The CWO has always argued that Labour is a party of capital. Even the much vaunted Clause 4 was only adopted in 1918 under the threat of a real socialist revolution in Russia. In doing so it created a myth which has helped to maintain the capitalist order throughout this century. The myth was that nationalisation was a step towards socialism when in fact it was really a way to reorganise and preserve capitalism under state control. Labour's record in government has been a sorry story from 1924 onwards. As we wrote long before Blair appeared on the scene,

*...what of the alternative the ruling class has to offer - the Labour Party? ... The Labour Party has done no more than manage the existing capitalist economy.... Nationalisation was just the step before 'rationalisation' in which thousands of miners and railway workers lost their jobs.... What if 'real socialists', like Benn and Scargill, took over the Labour Party? ... What 'programme' could they offer the working class? More nationalisation? That would mean more lay-offs.*

Labour in power has always been at least as good as the Tories at attacking the working class.

*...despite the tremendous attacks the present Tory government is making on the working class, the record of previous Labour governments is not easily forgotten. And this goes for the left-wing variety just as much... The 1945-51 left-wing Labour government did not hesitate to impose 'austerity' on the working class and used troops against those sections of the workers, like the dockers who refused to accept its attacks*

Both quotes come from *Workers Voice* 1 and 2, autumn and winter 1980.

The Trotskyist and Stalinist "left", the state capitalist wing of capitalism has always urged us to think of the Labour Party, of whatever form, as the natural electoral home for workers. Those with longer memories will remember that the SWP said in 1974 "vote Labour for the last time!" In every election since the SWP has continued its electoral support for Labour. On top of that we have had all the entryist groups

like Militant, Socialist Organiser and Workers Power talking revolution one day whilst canvassing for Labour the next. As if this hypocrisy was not bad enough we now have Scargill and the motley crew forming the SLP to be "a real labour party" but its identification of nationalisation as socialism shows that it really is nothing more than a repeat of the nationalised capitalist programme which Labour has now abandoned. Socialism is not about electoral politics, it is about workers actively participating in organising their own society.

## The Needs of the Ruling Class

Democratic capitalism has to have at least two parties, at least, who can take up the cudgel of government. The Labour party has traditionally formed governments when there has been a likelihood of rising class struggle. Workers are less likely to move the struggle on when they are obviously put under the cosh by what they are told is 'their' party. In this respect it must be remembered that Labour has used troops against workers in struggle seven times more often than the Tories since the Second World War. The only difference between New Labour and Old Labour is that in the past the Labour Party used "socialist" rhetoric before the election and then followed it by conservative action. Now that Blair offers conservative rhetoric before the election what can we expect after it?

## Blair's marriage vows

Capital needs to continue its swingeing cuts in welfare payments and a further reduction in relative wage levels (see article on the welfare state in this issue). There is no doubt that Labour is prepared to meet that need. As Blair seeks to bring 'new Labour' to the altar with its long time partner capital, he has made a number of vows -

*I vow we will have reduced the proportion we spend on the welfare bills of social failure  
I vow the promises we make on tax, we will keep  
I vow we will keep government borrowing and inflation within our targets*

These are things that even the Tories could not have dreamed of saying in 1974 or 1979. Today that old enemy of working class struggle, Barbara Castle seems almost revolutionary in



her debates with Harriet Harman over pensions. Pensions will be a target for government, whether Labour or Tory, in the years to come. A Labour government will do precisely what a Tory government would do in the same situation - attack workers and back capital.

Thus the Labour party is being promoted as the friend of business. The Tories are in no position to push through any further cuts, they are too closely identified with previous attacks on workers' living standards and are in any case so grossly divided between pro- and anti- European sections. Blair, however, offers up a relatively united party, even though there are odd voices of dissent these have been swiftly trodden down - as with Claire Short, Barbara Castle and so on. The capitalist ruling class can feel safe entrusting the mantle of government to this united party.

### But there are still the unions

Leftists still console themselves that if Labour has failed then the unions are still the real Labour Movement. They always reply to our argument that the unions are bourgeois by saying that the unions belong to the workers and not the bureaucrats at the head of them. They insist that we should fight to install new leaderships, or create rank and file organisations within them. The reality is that as one union hack explained a short time ago

*I am not here to fight for anything other than better redundancy terms for my members.*

For years the unions have involved themselves in a Dutch auction with capital, fighting to undercut all and sundry to keep hold of what little power they have, while the parties, particularly the Labour party, keeps them as both organisers of the vote and fillers of purses. On the other hand unions are now furiously involved in campaigns to see who dares to offer the largest minimum wage level (an irrelevance since no country actually operates their own legal minimum) and attempting to strike radical poses as defenders of the working class. Most hypocritical of all is the Unison campaign which denounces the "fat cat" but omits to tell its

members that its General Secretary, Rodney Bickerstaffe earns over £71,000 a year. But even such pillars of capitalism as the *Financial Times* realise that the unions pose no threat to their system - after all the existence of unions depends on the continued existence of wage labour and capital. In a *Financial Times* interview Bill Morris, self-styled "manager" of the TGWU, announced that

*I'm a big believer in the stakeholder economy. The bosses are not an enemy. What you have is a bargain between capital and labour. Sometimes capital doesn't keep to its side of the bargain. They don't invest - or they move investment to Sweden or Korea. That's like labour striking, failing to keep a bargain. But strikes should always be the last resort.*

20.7.96

Morris is here expressing the essence of trades unionism (not the personal views of a right wing Secretary). For revolutionaries unions became the partner of capital when they rallied to the defence of the national states in 1914. It is therefore no surprise that they can happily accept the current orientation of the Labour Party.

The Blairing of the Labour Party has nothing at all to do with the working class because it has never been anything else but a capitalist party. However the expulsion of the "Marxists" and the entryists does add one more element to the current crisis of the Leftists. All these groups who once recruited on the coat-tails of Labour are now revealed as politically bankrupt followers of capital. With the working class facing its most serious attacks in two generations the whole motley crew of Trotskyists and neo-Stalinists etc., from the SWP, Workers Power, Socialist Organiser (Alliance for Workers' Liberty), International Communist Party (Social Equality Party), WRP (of any form or name), RCP, to the SLP, have nothing to offer.

Only Internationalists like ourselves defend the independent programme of the working class. Our basic positions are defended in the pamphlet *Socialism or Barbarism* (£2 from the group address). Our current lines of orientation are to

- ignore the minimum wage
- fight to overcome the sectionalism imposed on the working class by union led campaigns
- fight the JSA
- fight each successive attack on welfare benefits and wages
- campaign for an active abstention in the coming general election
- ignore all capitalist parties but fight to establish independent means of action against all the attacks against us
- build a centralised international party in preparation for the global class confrontation to come.

*The Wages of a Fat Cat*  
From the Unison Magazine

## (2) Remuneration paid to President, General Secretary and members of the executive

### General Secretary

Salary and other benefits	£71,227
Employer's superannuation contribution	£8,164
Total remuneration for the year ended 31.12.95	£79,391



## Imperialism

# The Thieves Fall Out Over Baghdad (and a few other places...)

When the Eastern Bloc collapsed we were told that we had at last got "peace in our time". Now we had "a new world order". Even its immediate disruption by the Gulf War was cited as an example of the new global co-operation between the world's leading states which would now be possible. Since then every crisis that has emerged has been explained as due to local causes. It was warlordism in Somalia, tribalism in Rwanda and Burundi and nationalism in the ex-Yugoslav territories. In the meantime the media were full of stories of great successes for the international community in achieving "peace". In Ireland, in Israel and most of all in Bosnia. But the facts have not fitted the words. The Oslo Agreement between the PLO and the Israeli state is in tatters with the Likud election victory leading to further Jewish "settlements" (i.e. Zionist colonies) being established in the West Bank territories. In Ireland everyone, including such self-proclaimed revolutionary Marxists as the SWP, are using the peace issue to support their particular faction. The "peace process" has become such a good thing that like apple pie, everybody wants a slice of it. It is always "the other side" that is "putting it in danger". The bombings in Docklands, the sectarian stand-offs and murders and the continual threats of the paramilitaries don't seem to count as breaches in the so-called "cease-fire". In this Alice in Wonderland world, where words mean what the ruling class want them to mean, reality has been replaced by the most massive illusions. The Grandest Illusion is in Bosnia where the disintegration of that state veiled as the Dayton Peace accords (see *Revolutionary Perspectives* 3) has proceeded apace. After the US bombed the Serbs to the negotiating table only direct military intervention has made it possible to pretend that the agreement is working. The farcical elections which were bound to favour the ultra-nationalists have duly created a sense of an armed truce which could fracture at any time. Only the I-FOR troops and the US control of financial aid stand between the

Bosnian state and its final dismantling.

Which brings us to the real issue. Whilst the press everywhere seeks to point the finger at local causes for local conflicts these conflicts would be minor if it was not for intervention of what we can call the "Great Powers". The question that is before us is not why these Great Powers cannot keep the peace but why do they manoeuvre to actually create more virulent wars in so many different parts of the planet.

### The Threats to Pax Americana

The collapse of the Eastern Bloc delivered world domination to the Western Bloc. In truth this process, as we repeatedly stated after 1982, had already been well developed even before the final collapse of the USSR. The USSR's only serious challenge to the US bloc was through military assistance (e.g. to Vietnam) but the feebleness of even this was shown up in the Middle East when the Israeli Army easily defeated the better-armed Syrians in the Beqaa Valley in 1982. Since that time, despite the odd setback, the USA has been the main dominating power in the whole of the Middle East. Gradually we saw too that in areas where the USSR's clients had been victorious they not only did not get help from the USSR to rebuild the country but were soon turning to the West for help. In Angola the MPLA invited Gulf Oil back whilst the country became a killing ground for rival Western-backed national liberation gangs in the 1980s. However this was a rare aberration. Basically the post-1945 situation which created two enormous armed blocs in the north of the planet meant that it was relatively easy for the USA to discipline its clients and so-called allies. The classic case was precisely forty years ago in 1956 when the USA forced Israel, Britain and France to back down in their attack on Nasser after the latter had "nationalised" the Suez Canal. In fact Nasser in no way affected Western interests when he did this (even allowing the Suez Canal Co. which was



British and French owned to carry on collecting tolls). U.S. President Eisenhower immediately recognised that the U.S. could come to Nasser's aid and try to head off the USSR's growing influence in the region. It was another case of the old colonial powers being defeated by more modern capitalist imperialism.

And when the capitalist cycle of accumulation entered its phase of crisis at the beginning of the 1970s it was Eisenhower's former Vice-President Nixon who had no hesitation in getting his allies to pay the cost of the U.S. crisis by devaluing the dollar and ushering in the era of floating currencies. As the dollar had been "as good as gold" until then all those Western powers holding dollars were suddenly paying for the US deficit. And since the oil-producing states were then compelled to raise the price of oil (which was calculated exclusively in dollars), all those European states (and Japan) without oil suddenly had the extent of the crisis brought home to them. The USA could get away with making its allies "pay the price of freedom" because of the need to maintain the discipline of the Western bloc against the rival in the East.

Today however the situation is different. There is no Stalinist rival to act as an external disciplinary force on the Western bloc. This explains the extent of some of the recent conflicts throughout the world. In 1990-1 the Western Allies, as well as the frightened monarchies of the Middle East, rushed to support the US in "Operation Desert Storm". Saddam Hussein was portrayed as a bloodthirsty dictator who violated all the norms of humanity. This was true but the question is why was this same dictator armed by the West (including the chemical weapons he used against the Kurdish civilians in Halabja). Why was he invited by the CIA to attack Iran in 1980 and enjoyed US logistical support throughout the war? Only the blind cannot see that Saddam's ambition to make Iraq the arbiter of the Middle East could only have begun if he had the backing of the West. When the West abandoned Iraq at the end of the Iran-Iraq War all Iraq had gained was \$10 billions of debt. As Iraq had always claimed Kuwait (it was actually artificially hived off by the British in order to control Gulf oil independently of Iraq) the logical response was to demand the Rumailah oil fields. The signs are that the US was at first prepared to sanction this but when Saddam took over all Kuwait the whole question of US domination came into play. Not only did Saddam now control the head of the Gulf but with it a sizeable portion of the world's oil trade. He had to be stopped. On the face of it the US was enormously successful in getting together a coalition (and then belatedly thought to get international legitimacy by getting UN resolutions to back it up) which involved, at different

levels more than twenty countries. Countries lined up in sycophantic fashion to receive US approval according to their contribution. Germany and Japan had to pay up since they sent no troops (hiding behind constitutions which have since been amended) whilst France lost merit marks because it did not put its forces under direct US control. So it was the British who went to the top of the class and expected to receive a reward when the war was over. In this they were to be disappointed. When Kuwait was "liberated" back into the tender hands of the Sabah family (who soon showed that Saddam did not have a monopoly on mass murder) the British expected to get contracts to rebuild the place. But very few came their way (and these were in dangerous and specialised tasks like removing the minefields). Clearly Pax Americana was not going to be much of a partnership.

### **Imperialism behind the Rwanda Massacres**

Since then we have slowly seen the unravelling of the ties that band the Western alliance. In some conflicts there have been long standing historical rivalries which have once again come to the fore. For example in Rwanda, a former German colony which was given to Belgium after the First World War, the increasing integration between the former Hutu majority and former Tutsi aristocracy had been largely prevented by the introduction of different identity cards for the two groups. Tutsis were deliberately favoured by the Belgian colonialists. Once the Belgians were booted out in 1962 it was the French who took over. They have always used the Hutus against the Tutsis and supported a Rwandan Army which they knew was planning a genocidal attack which killed 1 million people in 100 days. In their turn the South African government of Nelson Mandela sold the Rwandan Army the ammunition.

The USA also aided the massacres although this was due to short-sightedness rather than policy. Part of the agenda of US imperialism is to wipe out the UN as an inconvenient alternative focus for global intervention. As the US supplied half the budget it was not hard for them to get their wish when they insisted that the UN task force in Kigali be cut to 250 soldiers without armoured weapons. This was to backfire on the US which along with Britain and Belgium has supported the Tutsi, Rwanda Patriotic Front which now has control of the country. Today it is the French who protect the Hutu militias in the refugee camps where they have cynically robbed the Hutus who had to flee with them. The Hutu militias are only awaiting the right kind of imperialist line-up before they will once again start attacking the country. These facts



clearly come out in the book *Season of Blood* by the BBC correspondent Fergal Keane. Keane has no analysis of why the Great Powers act as they do, simply a humanitarian criticism of their actions. However his unwitting testimony shows that these actions are not simply the result of local backwardness but are inflated into major disasters by the intervention of powers each pursuing their own interests. This is imperialism.

### Trade Rivalries

The same unwinding of the Western alliance can be seen elsewhere. Last year there was the case of Conoco. Conoco was awarded the contract to carry out a \$600 million gas project in Iran but was refused permission to sign it by the US government. The contract then went to the French company CFP Totale. This outraged the US.

*The Europeans really irritate us over Iran. We make sacrifices in an effort to tackle the problem that threatens the security of us all, only to see our allies making profits out of what we have voluntarily given up.... We do not want to start a war. But if dialogue fails and terrorism continues, one must be prepared to exert pressure. Europe is not doing this.*

An unnamed American official quoted in the *Independent* 20.8.96.

The US ruling class have since decided to take what can only be described as an unprecedented step of penalising any company from any country which signs deals with those states it dislikes, Iran, Libya and Cuba (the Helms-Burton Act). Part of this has been suspended until January but it has already provoked European fury. Germany and France have led the outrage by stating that they would retaliate if any of their citizens or companies were affected. Even Canada, which is hardly in a position to let go of the coat-tails of the US is blandly flouting the Act in establishing trade deals with Cuba while the US maintains its self-imposed embargo.

### The Kurdish Crisis

The recent events in Kurdistan throw all the elements discussed above into huge relief. In the first place we have a long-running historical problem left over from centuries of imperialist interference. The Kurds are perhaps the largest linguistic group in the world not to have some national territory that they can call their own. The Kurdish national movement was weakened by the fact that it was riven with tribalism (even if today that tribalism takes on a more modern ring to it by hiding behind the initials of different political parties). The best chance Kurdish

nationalism had came at the end of the First World War when the Turkish Empire in the Middle East was broken up and handed over as mandates to the British and French. The British got what is now Iraq but faced with the Mosul question (as the Kurdish independence issue was known at the time) they decided to defend the territorial integrity of their new acquisition. As a result Kurdish civilians were the first people in history to experience British civilisation by being bombed by the newly formed Royal Air Force in 1923. All the more ironic then the British Defence Secretary's references to the brutality of Saddam Hussein in Kurdistan today as justification for supporting the bombing of Baghdad.

The Kurdish ruling class missed the boat. The continuing divisions amongst the Kurds has meant that they have always been at the mercy of the alliances and enemies of the states which control Kurdish-speaking lands. It is the perfect illustration of the long held view of the Communist Left that the era of national liberation has long since passed. All we can have now in the age of imperialism are pseudo-national struggles where each faction is in fact sustained and supported by one or other imperialist power. Kurdistan covers four states (Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey). No major power would want to back it against all of these states. As a result the rival Kurdish groups in each are usually manipulated by the ruling classes of the other countries. The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan led by the Talabani has now been a long time ally of Iran and a thorn in the side of Saddam (as well as the Turkish state through its alliance with the Turkish PKK). The Kurdish Democratic Party on the other hand is led by the Barzani clan and has been anti-Iranian. However the defeat of Iraq in the Gulf War and the setting up of no-fly zones in Northern Iraq has meant that this has been the best territory in which to play out Kurdish rivalries. These increased as Saddam Hussein's regime used Kurdistan as a conduit to break the oil embargo. The local Kurdish rulers complied because of the customs revenue they gained from the trade, worth 3 million dollars a month. However the thieves fell out over their share of the tolls when UN Resolution 986 came into force. This legally allowed Iraq to export oil worth \$2 billions. The result was a loss of revenue for the Kurdish factions so the main target for both of them was to get control of the pipeline to Turkey.

Matters came to a head this summer when the PUK, with Iranian help started to take control of more territory (in the course of which, we understand, many Kurdish workers who supported the leftist national liberation group Komala were executed). The KDP, which had tolerated the setting up of a Kurdish National Party in Irbil by the CIA, turned to the USA for help. Their



requests fell on deaf ears and so the KDP (not for the first time) turned to Saddam. For Saddam this was a perfect chance to destroy the KNP and so he took the gamble of supporting the KDP (the no-fly zone did not exclude Iraqi helicopter gunships). Once the Iraqis entered Irbil they went straight to the houses of the CIA agents and shot 100 of them in the street. Their US controllers had already fled to Turkey. It was this action rather than defence of the Kurds or the imminence of the US election that brought US retaliation against "targets" in Southern Iraq.

There were, of course other factors which affected the US decision to bomb Southern Iraq. In the first place not all the US' allies would cooperate. Turkey refused the US the use of its bases in Southern Turkey because it supported the KDP's advance since this, they hoped, would also weaken the PKK. Ironically Turkey has just signed an oil agreement with Iran so it must be treading a fine line between support for Iraq and support for Iran. Neither development though is welcome to the USA,

Further signs that the US was having difficulty recalling the coalition against Saddam of nearly six years ago was the refusal of the French and Russian governments to support the bombings. They had been calling for implementation of UN directives allowing Iraqi oil to come to the market to pay for desperately needed humanitarian aid to the suffering people of Iraq. By anathematising Saddam the US can now prevent this and the policy of making the Iraqis suffer further for not getting rid of Saddam (which the US refused to sanction at the end of the Gulf War). It also makes the US more popular with the Saudi government since it maintains the oil price and thus helps them to manage their growing economic crisis. It needs all the help it can get here since Saudi Arabia, so long the dependable ally of the US in the Cold War is now beginning to resent the US presence on its soil. The bombing of the US base in Dhahran last June shows that the US no longer has a reliable ally anywhere.

However when it comes to the Great Powers the US were also keen to show to the French and Russians that they still could call the shots in the Middle East. This is especially the case with France which not only had the temerity to use Syria as its local client to get involved in the so-called peace process but has also been cosyng up to Tehran. The Russians in their turn are about to sign a pipeline agreement with either Turkey or Iran (or possibly both if they can solve the Chechen issue) and thus wanted to demonstrate that they had an independent lie. It was ironic though to see the Butchers of

Grozay giving the US lectures on humanitarian behaviour!

Britain came out as more pro-US than ever. After their flirtations with the Franco-British peacekeeping force to aid the Serbs in Bosnia and after the US forced the British government to negotiate with the IRA there has been little sign of any independent British policies anywhere. Indeed the sense is one of paralysis. The British ruling class have always been sceptical of a future bloc in Europe but now they are hopelessly divided over the benefits of closer integration. The US remains not only the richest single nation state but it also offers a good market for British finance capital. The problem is that if the British were left out of a single European currency then London could lose its prime role as the leading money market in Europe. The result has been that conflicting signals have been sent out by different ministers. This is not unusual in the history of imperialism. At the moment there is no feasible alternative to US domination but that does not stop its former allies from trying to push their interests here or there around the planet. As long as the US has the ability to deploy its enormous military power the confused situation where countries will be allies in one area but rivals in another will take a long time to work itself out. In the meantime more of the world's population will find that they are visited by wars which become more barbaric and genocidal the nearer we get to the next century. AD

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# Deaths Mount as the "Peace Process" Keeps On Course

In the past we have often quoted Bertolt Brecht's line that "when the leaders talk of peace then the war plans are already prepared". Now such phrases seem to belong to a refreshingly direct, naive, epoch in history when reality and its expression were more in tune. Now, all over the planet we have been inundated with "peace processes". Amazingly no amount of violence seems to disrupt these processes. No matter how many die there is always "life in the peace process". The most grotesque of these "peace processes" is in Palestine/Israel. Despite dozens of deaths in the West Bank and Gaza in the last few weeks we have been solemnly assured by all the parties to the conflict that the "peace process" still continues. Perhaps we should re-write Von Clausewitz dictum to read "Peace is war by other means".

The recent explosions of the violence in Palestine/Israel were the results of the failure of the Israeli state to implement the Oslo peace accords. They have not withdrawn from Hebron or even set a date for such withdrawal. They have increased their stranglehold over Jerusalem by the continued building of "settlements" around the Eastern end of the city. This is an attempt to deny the Palestinians any hope that it would be split and become part of their semi-state.

The leftist press have asserted that the breakdown in the "peace process" is a result of the intransigence of the new right-wing Likud government. This is not true since it was under Labour that most of the current crisis arose. Labour agreed to "freeze" new Jewish settlements on the West Bank but this excluded the area around Jerusalem. Thus in the last four years the Israeli population of "Greater Jerusalem" expanded 50% from 105,940 to 151,324 and now outnumber the Palestinians. Likud are thus hardly any different from Labour. The reasons for the collapse of the Oslo Accords go deeper than the superficial differences between two ruling class parties in Israel.

It did not take special prescience to realise that the Oslo Accords would not hold. There are too many imperialist interests at stake to allow for that. The recent fighting might have its roots in the situation in Hebron and Jerusalem but its continuation is guaranteed by the continued manoeuvrings of the powers and in particular with the tendency to fragmentation of the

Western Alliance. As we reported in our last issue (*If this is peace who needs war?* in *Revolutionary Perspectives* 3) the US no longer enjoys unchallenged domination in the Middle East. Now that the Soviet Union no longer exists the need for Western bloc discipline is not so great. Now the various European powers are cautiously feeling their way back into an area from which they were expelled forty years ago. In particular the French have sided with the Arab states opposed to the US great ally in the area Israel, in particular Syria. It was through Damascus that the French tried to get a say in the "peace process" after the Israeli bombings of Qana in Lebanon. They were brusquely told to keep their noses out by the US. But the European advance continues. Whilst the US still basically bankrolls both Egypt and Israel (by far the greatest recipients of US foreign aid) the EU countries have footed 75% of the bill for Palestinian autonomy.

When it was clear that the Clinton government intended to support Israel in the Washington summit (the invitation to King Hussein of Jordan was an insult to the PLO since Hussein is always quoted by the Israelis as the real leader of the West Bank Palestinians) Arafat had to show his independence. Ever since the collapse of the USSR and the disastrous policy of backing Saddam in the Gulf War the PLO has been forced to beg at the Washington table. However the emergence of the Europeans as a force in the area has opened up alternative supporters for the PLO. It was not surprising that Arafat thus stopped off in European capitals (and dropped in on the Franco-Italian Summit in Naples on his way home). He was demonstrating to the US that the PLO also had options and that they should force the Israelis to carry out the Oslo Accords. At the Dublin Summit of EU state leaders the Middle East was on the agenda. There, in what the *Guardian* called "a defiant intervention" they proposed to send the Irish Foreign Minister, Dick Spring to the Middle East as an intermediary. The US Secretary of State, Warren Christopher tried to warn the Europeans off but they went ahead anyway and even proposed having a permanent European "peacemaker" stationed in the Middle East, like Carl Bildt in Bosnia. All these manoeuvres show only one thing that under the present capitalist order with its drive to control resources like water and oil there will be no peace even if there is much hot air about a peace process.



# Ireland - only the working class can answer "the national question"

The working-class in Northern Ireland have endured another "long hot summer". The everyday realities of social hardship were punctuated with murder, open repression by the British Army, "punishment" (including more murders and maiming) handed out by the rival paramilitary gangs, forced evictions and destruction of homes and barrages of threats and intimidation from various factions of the rival political formations.

All these anti-working class abominations have taken place within the context of and as a result of - imperialism's attempts to implement its "Pax Americana" (for our earlier comments see *Workers' Voice* 74 and 79). The convoluted election came and went, with its bizarre rules to ensure representation of "minor parties", particularly the UDP and PUP (political representatives of the UDA and UVF Loyalist gangs). Rather than appearing as another step towards normalisation and its intended goal of providing a statesman-like image for both Clinton and Major, the strategy proved capable of stirring the pot further and unleashing a whole set of new rivalries and tensions within and between the political and paramilitary organisations.

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While still being unable to accommodate the desires of Sinn Féin/IRA the increased jockeying for a share of the spoils in a new settlement funded by US and EU investment was enough to produce fresh fractures, particularly within the Loyalist camp. These were in evidence as loyalist factions challenged each other for control of their fiefdoms. Two episodes illustrate those rivalries clearly.

Firstly there was the proclaimed banishment of two paramilitary leaders by the "official" loyalist armed leadership. In response, Billy Wright, one of those banned (probably for having, at

least, argued for "one murder too many" during the summer) was able to address a mass rally accompanied by the M.P., William MacRea of the Paisleyite DUP. MacRea's participation was a response to the challenge posed to the DUP by the increasingly populist statements from such as the PUP's David Ervine. That move to a populist, even Labourist-style, was also evidenced when Billy Hutchinson of the PUP spoke at a debate at the summer rally organised by the Trotskyist "Workers Liberty" (formerly *Socialist Organiser*) group. In fact, as "Workers Liberty" informed its readers after the meeting

*The PUP has the now jettisoned British Labour Party's socialist (sic) Clause Four in its constitution. (WL 33, July 96).*

Of course, the rivalry over control of guns, territory and business (drug dealing, extortion and other scams as well as new "legitimate" investment) is not limited to the Loyalist groups. As well as the clear tensions within the mainstream Republican movement about how to position themselves in the "Peace Process" there was also the murder of an INLA leader, supposedly as a result of factional disputes.

The stresses in the Sinn Féin/IRA approach now that the political talks are clearly not delivering for them was shown in the bombing of Manchester in June. The spectacular (in several senses) discovery of a collection of arms and explosives by the British state in London in September and the state execution of one of the alleged terrorists served to show the usefulness of terrorist activity in providing imperialism with propaganda coups.

The manoeuvres of the bourgeois political fractions will certainly continue to pile on additional suffering for the working class in Northern Ireland. Those manoeuvres will, in turn increase as



the two major powers, the UK and USA attempt to intervene to get their version of "peace" adopted. Although both Clinton and Major have been partly frustrated in their wish to appear as the "normalizers" of capitalism in Northern Ireland, the structures which have been established will continue as a source of friction between the USA and UK until they collapse or are replaced.

### Marxism - the only solution

Marxism is not a magic wand which can be waved to make the problems of capitalism disappear. Neither is it an excuse, as misrepresented by the various strands of leftism, to choose one capitalist option as "the lesser evil" or "the more progressive"

On the contrary, Marxism tips away the mystifications of all strands of bourgeois ideology, specifically including national liberationism so beloved of the capitalist left in Britain and Ireland (particularly by the myriad strands of Trotskyism).

In 1975 the CWO issued an analysis of the situation in Ireland which was republished with factual corrections and minor corrections in 1979 in *Revolutionary Perspectives 15* (first series). That article, entitled "Marxism and the Irish Question" provides a series of extremely useful insights into the historic development of capitalism in Ireland, the political evolution of Irish Society including the origins of Orangeism, the role of Republicanism and the long-term absence of a coherent proletarian political voice.

The article also, importantly, outlined the differences between revolutionary communists such as Luxemburg and Bukharin and those who adhered to the formal Leninist position on national liberation. In summarising the position of internationalist communists, *Marxism and the Irish Question* contains the essential elements which inform our attitude to fights for national liberation.

The following extract lies at the core of the article.

*In the epoch of crises, wars and social decomposition, the class could only respond with the communist programme. In this period the development of any national capitals onto the world market in an independent fashion be-*

*came impossible; national liberation struggles became inter-imperialist struggles in which the working class had nothing to gain and much to lose. The epoch when the class could support national liberation came to a definitive end in 1914, all possible support for one bourgeois bloc against another, or alliances of classes against feudal reaction were henceforth things of the past.*

Or, in Luxemburg's own words again quoted in the article

*In this era of unfettered imperialism, there can no longer be national wars ... For no suppressed nation can freedom and independence blossom forth from the politics of imperialist states and the imperialist war. Small nations, whose ruling classes are appendages and accessories of their class comrades in the large nations, are merely pawns in the imperialist game played by the major powers.*

The article also contained a number of other critical insights which are well worth repeating. The basic desire of British imperialism was, and remains, to establish normal conditions for capitalist exploitation in Northern Ireland. The article encapsulated the position that

*the interests of British imperialism lie in the amalgamation of both parts of Ireland into the EEC with the UK as a whole ... As the ma-*

*ment the debts of one  
sectarian confrontation  
for capital are much  
greater than any ben-  
efits it brings such as  
minimisation of the  
class struggle and the  
lower costs of labour  
power.*

*Rosa Luxemburg*

collapse of the Soviet bloc and the emergence of the US as the sole superpower whilst Europe both within and outside the EU (European Union, formerly EEC) has become a melting pot of conflicting national interests. However the basic aim of dissolving the problems of Northern Ireland into a new relationship within the EU remains at the heart of imperialism's plans.

As well as providing essential analysis the article also provides details of the working-class struggles which took place in the first decades of this century before the class dynamic was buried beneath bourgeois ideology. Notably the article outlines the major strikes which took place in Belfast (1907) and Dublin (1913). There were also major strikes in Belfast in 1919 mirroring the struggles which took place in and around



Glasgow. Perhaps the most telling episode commented on in the article is also symptomatic of the tragedy of class interest being overcome and dominated by nationalist forces.

*In the south after World War One, elements of the working class struggled to free themselves from the nationalist incubus, and during the bourgeois "troubles", workers in Cork and Limerick took over some factories where production was begun under workers' management, and set up "Soviets", so-called in imitation of the Russian ones. These were crushed by local units of the IRA (just as the struggles of the Belfast workers were defeated by the Unionist capitalists) and ousted owners were handed back their plants at the point of IRA guns.*

Having brought together the elements of historical analysis the article ended with a summary which again provides a meaningful starting point for communists today.

*But in Ulster, as elsewhere, socialists must struggle within the class for the communist programme as the only hope humanity has of avoiding barbarism as the crisis deepens .... as is only in the context of a world struggle for communism that we can expect to see significant positive developments among the Irish workers. These developments must be many times greater than the high points of Irish class struggles in 1919 and 1920 during the last revolutionary wave. Till then the workers will be trapped in a barbarous impasse; to try and end on a more optimistic note for the immediate future would only be to spread confusion.*

The working class holds the only answer to "the national question" whether in Ireland or elsewhere. As a class with no country it alone can create a world order in which the imperialist powers and their pawns cannot wreak misery on the workers. This, as we wrote in 1975 is not on the immediate agenda but it is the only rational solution for humanity. To achieve it requires another international wave of working class struggle and revolution like that which brought World War One to an end. This would first paralyse the imperialist capacity to manipulate local conflicts and then go on to create a world where national frontiers had disappeared. It is for that goal that the CWO is fighting and this is why we are opposed to all the imperialisms masquerading as "national liberation movements"

KT

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The continuation of capitalist rule depends on the passivity of the exploited class. Help us to break that mentality.

Review Article

# Our "Leninism" ... and theirs'

*"The future everywhere belongs to Bolshevism"*

Rosa Luxemburg 1918

Recently a US publication called *Discussion Bulletin* which seems to be a talking shop for ex-De Leonists and Socialist Party of Great Britain members published an article from *Revolutionary Perspectives 2* entitled "The Socialist Labour Party - then and now". In introducing us to their audience the *Discussion Bulletin* described us as "Left Leninists". We are not quite sure what they meant by this. We think it was mainly to warn their readers that our historical account of the old (and revolutionary) SLP might in some way be flawed by the fact that the SLP saw themselves as the "British Bolsheviks" and that we are quite happy to see them, for all their weaknesses, as part of the revolutionary tradition of the working class. This seems to be confirmed by a later comment from DB's editors that they regretted that the SLP in Britain was not printing anything by De Leon after 1917 but plenty by Lenin.

However we also think that calling us "Left Leninist" was also a sloppy way of pigeon-holing our politics. Let us be quite clear. We do not mind being called "Leninists" provided that means what we mean! This clarification is necessary since the term has had an odd and even more chequered history than say "Marxism". In the first place there were Leninists before there were Bolsheviks. It was common practice to term "Leninist" anyone who accepted the ideas put forward at the 1903 Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party. It was a name that stuck despite the fact that by 1906 the Mensheviks were accepting everything that was thought to be distinctively "Leninist" at the 1906 Unity Conference. After 1912 when the Bolsheviks finally separated from the Mensheviks they were still often referred to as "Leninists". However the defeat of the Russian Revolution muddled the waters and the term "Leninism" has come to mean either approval or condemnation of both the revolution and of Lenin, depending on the purpose of the user. We were driven to reconsider this question by the recent publication of a book simply entitled *Leninism* by Neil Harding, Professor of Politics at the University of Swansea.

Fifteen years ago one of our comrades reviewed for us the Professor's earlier, and much larger, work *Lenin's Political Thought* (in the second series of *Revolutionary Perspectives*). We wrote

*It would be no exaggeration to say that this was the best book on Lenin ever written by a bourgeois academic. Not that the details of his life, or the events of the Russian Revolution are chronicled in it to any great extent. Rather the book is a study of Lenin the theoretician, and it attempts to demonstrate the coherence of Lenin's praxis. Rather than being a masterful opportunist, Harding demonstrates that Lenin's strategic prescriptions were always grounded firmly in Marxist theory. Harding also shows that there were two main phases in Lenin's thought, and what he wrote in each can only be understood in context. The first phase up to 1914 saw Lenin working for the coming Russian bourgeois revolution, and the second for the international proletarian revolution.*

*Revolutionary Perspectives 21 p.29*

Actually as we recognised in the same article Harding identifies a third phase

*The book is also very good on how, with Russia isolated and the proletariat facing defeat, the coherence of Lenin's theory collapsed in 1921, and that after his political positions were personalised and ad-hoc, with no real theoretical basis. In other words the years 1921-4, an epoch of leftism is nourished, were years of empiricism and opportunism in Lenin's thought.*

## Lenin and Marxism

*Lenin's Political Thought* is a substantial work with much textual quotation and every quotation placed in historical context. We might therefore expect Harding's *Leninism* to be a useful addition to the study of the main motivating forces of the Bolshevik Revolution. Instead it is a carefully constructed attempt to blame Lenin for the Stalinist counter-revolution. Harding still maintains that Lenin was never an opportunist but whereas this was considered a mark worthy of respect back in the 1970s today, with the implosion of the Stalinist system and the ruling class "discourse", to use an over-favoured academic argot, excluding both the idea of socialism and the possibility of working class independent action, Harding has made no secret that his aim is to destroy "Leninism" because it is the enemy of pluralism and democracy. It seems



we are all democrats now.

Let's examine how he goes about it. In the main, the lines of the argument remain the same. Harding points out correctly that *What is to be Done?* written in 1902, is not the fountainhead of "Leninism". In it Lenin simply repeated all the arguments of traditional social democracy, the arguments of Plekhanov and Kautsky, that the working class, left to itself, could not arrive at socialist consciousness without the intervention of intellectuals who had the time, the leisure and the education to elaborate it. Lenin was actually a touch more spontaneist than Kautsky who was much more up front about bourgeois intellectuals being the vehicle of science. Lenin did recognise that socialist ideology came from the working class' own struggles, even if the workers did not have the time to reflect on them. And, as Harding points out, Lenin always stated after 1907 that *What is to be Done?* was written for a specific stage of the struggle of Russian social democracy when the main task was to combat the idea of Rabocheye Dyelo and the Credo group who argued that the tasks of socialists were confined to tail-ending the economic struggle. It was a position that Lenin was to profoundly change as a result of the experiences of the 1905 Revolution. His change of views hardly mattered in the period of reaction in the decade that followed but they were to have enormous significance in 1917. All this Harding tells us with utmost clarity. He thus dissociates his case from those of right-wing bigots like Richard Pipes and ignorant anarchists who have read nothing for themselves.

He also squashes the Menshevik notion that Lenin distorted Marxism by insisting that conditions for revolution were ripe in 1917. Harding quite categorically concludes that Lenin was the most orthodox of Marxists. This is not a badge of approval because, as it becomes quickly clear, Harding's real target is revolutionary Marxism itself. At this point we should quote the man himself.

*I will go on to maintain, in almost every chapter of this book, that Leninism was a much more authentic (if modified and updated) reading of Marxism than most commentaries allow. I maintain that Leninism was a tightly theorised species of doctrinaire Marxism (though I emphasise at this point that I do not necessarily [eh? CWO] consider this to be a mark of approbation). Both its considerable strengths and its considerable weaknesses were derived almost wholly from Marxism.*

ibid. p.4

We'll return to Harding's equivocation over

"necessarily" later but let's stick with his main project. For Harding

*...Leninism as a distinct ideology was formulated principally in the period 1914-17 and did not exist before this time.*

Let us say that we could not agree more. Harding summarises his case as follows.

*A central contention of this book is that Leninism, in its origins and content, is best understood as a reaction to world war. The capitalist economic and political civilisation that had produced this accretion (sic - CWO) of carnage, had, in Lenin's eyes, finally and irrevocably forfeited its right to exist. All those who, with whatever reservations or caveats, supported their country's participation in the war, had similarly forfeited their right to be counted progressive, still less socialist.*

ibid. p.8

*Lenin's Imperialism - the Highest Stage of Capitalism* gave a theoretical basis for world revolution. Lenin's theory of imperialism did a great deal more than explain the war. It provided Lenin's followers, then and since, with a comprehensive world view whose basis was the finding that capitalism, its political structures and the bourgeois values upon which they are based, was in its death throes. A civilisation, a whole epoch of history of humanity was finally drowning in blood. The purpose of his whole analysis was to demonstrate that this entire civilisation, this whole period of history, had declared its own bankruptcy. It could not be reformed or redeemed - it had reached its final brutal impasse and now had to be swept aside so that a new era could be born.

## The Decline of the October Revolution

If this was all Harding attributed to Leninism then we are Leninist to the core. However Harding goes a couple of steps further. In his earlier work *Lenin's Political Thought*, Harding paints a picture of Lenin in his declining years struggling to come to terms with the growing counter-revolution in Russia. Harding catalogues all the twists and turns Lenin made to try to restore the revolutionary core of the Soviet state - a state in which the working class were now largely absent. He talks of trying to reform the Rabkrin (the Workers' and Peasants' Inspectorate) which under Stalin had never achieved its aim of allowing more direct participation of the population in government. Here Lenin is desperately trying to use instrumental solutions to historical problems which go beyond the compass of a single individual. Harding also shows that factions are banned in the Bolshevik Party after 1921 because of the Workers' Opposition criticisms of the operation of the Soviet state

Yet it is Lenin who takes up their criticisms to lambast the Party into trying to reform. And Harding concludes that

*Part of the tragedy of Lenin's thought is that he too was increasingly obliged to discount and deny his initial vision. As his theoretical predictions, upon which the socialist revolution had been based, failed to materialise, as civil war, famine and industrial collapse consumed the country, he was obliged to retreat from his project for socialism in Russia.*

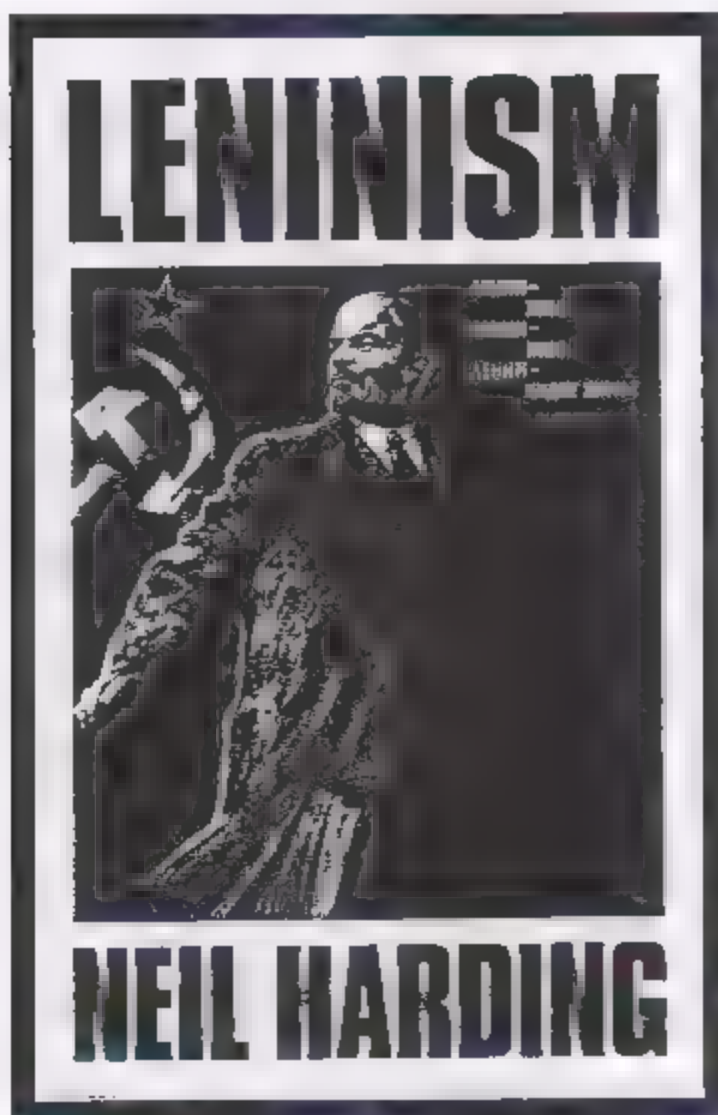
op cit Vol. II p.323-4

It was only with the failure of international revolution, with the disappearance of the

But Harding now abandons any attempt to see that Leninism was a revolutionary ideology or nothing (i.e. it depended on a revolutionary consciousness in the working class to make it operative). Instead of understanding that the process of decline of the revolutionary wave had actually wiped out the premise (world revolution) on which the Russian Revolution was based, Harding now inverts the procedure to assert that Leninism begat Stalinism and makes Lenin responsible for the next seventy years of history. As a writer on political theory it is perhaps natural for Harding to assert that Lenin's ideas shaped the history of his own time. As revolutionaries we can reject this on several grounds. In the first place the Russian Revolution was not "the product of one man's mind" as Harding would have us believe. Lenin had an enormous influence on the Bolshevik Party but his ideas were not accepted because he was cleverer than anyone else. What Lenin was saying responded to the revolutionary wishes of the working class. As Shlyapnikov's memoirs (*On the Eve of 1917*) and Rabinowitch's *The Bolsheviks Come to Power* both show it was only the leadership of the Bolshevik Party which had to be won over to the revolutionary programme in 1917. The rank and file were already demanding the same things as the April Theses. Similarly those who write the history of 1917 only through Lenin's writings arrive at a very distorted picture of reality. Lenin argued from his Finnish exile for the Bolsheviks to seize power after the failure of the Kornilov coup d'état for a whole month but his call fell on the deaf ears of his Party comrades. What precipitated the overthrow of the Provisional Government in October 1917 was not Lenin's injunctions but the attempt by the Provisional Government to shut the bridges across the River Neva (and thus prevent working class demonstrations reaching the city centre)

Nor can we accept Harding's conclusion that Lenin's revolutionary theory was shaped by just one man. In fact, as Harding himself stated in his earlier work, the analysis of imperialism and the war was based not only on Hilferding, Bukharin (and the English liberals, Hobson) but also on the debates he had held with Luxemburg and Piatakov before the war. Nor was Lenin a lone visionary as the activities of the left at the Zimmerwald and Kienthal conferences in 1915 and 1916 showed. What we can accept is the fact that Lenin was the clearest and most consistent defender of the view that only revolution could end the war. But for Harding this too is a weakness.

Typical of the déclassé intellectual Harding now dissociates himself from his more "scientific" (another dirty Leninist idea for Harding) work



revolutionary Russian proletariat (which Lenin recognised in October 1921) that Lenin turned to super-centralism and accepted the logic of the situation the Party would have to carry on where the class had failed. At the end Lenin's confusion was complete when he recognised that

*if we take that huge bureaucratic machine, that gigantic heap, we must ask: who is directing whom? I doubt very much whether it can truthfully be said that the Communists are directing that heap. To tell the truth they are not directing, they are being directed.*

Lenin Collected Works Vol. 33, speech at the Eleventh Party Congress.



In a footnote he states that in his earlier work

*The objective was to reconstruct the development of one man's ideas rather than (as in the present book) critically to engage an ideological position.*

This begs the question as to why the earlier book did not include even a hint of Harding's current criticisms. The fact that he began the project for *Lenin's Political Thought* in the 1970s (the first volume appeared in 1977) when the working class was fighting the first wave of attacks following the onset of the current capitalist crisis might have had something to do with it. Marxism and revolutionary ideas were then "in" for our professors. Today with the collapse of Stalinism (which they had always presented as communism), with the restructuring of capital which has temporarily forced the working class into retreat, there is not a day goes by when some hack or academic makes reference to "the death of Marxism". Like any other respectable bourgeois academic Harding shows his real class character in his current critique. He is hanging at the coat-tails of the current political set up which now asserts that democracy is good for you even if it steps up your exploitation whoever is elected. For Harding class society is now a permanent fixed entity and democracy is natural way of easing the claims of different social groupings. Leninism has to be condemned because it stands for internationalism (and not nationalism - the recognition that everyone in a certain territory has common interests), class war, and is anti-democratic. To all these we too proudly plead guilty.

### Democracy or Dictatorship

Some comrades feel slightly uneasy when we say we are against democracy and for the dictatorship of the proletariat. They would prefer us to call the dictatorship of the proletariat "workers' democracy". The names are not important. The point is that the dictatorship of the proletariat can only be exercised through workers' bodies (like soviets) which are directly and openly electable and revocable. The central thrust is that workers elect delegates who they mandate and have the power to recall. Democracy on the other hand is the political form of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. Voting takes place in secret so no-one has to take responsibility for how they vote. The voters elect representatives who are only subject to recall every few years and meanwhile can do as they like in parliamentary bodies. The whole aim of this system is to render the mass of the population powerless and apathetic leaving the great issues of the day to be settled by a few professional politicians who represent the moneyed capitalist class. Lenin called this

*... a democracy that is curtailed, wretched, false, a democracy only for the rich, for the minority.*

*The State and Revolution*

Under such arrangements it is impossible for socialism to arise because socialism can only come about through the involvement of the vast majority of the working class actively creating it. Lenin understood and not only expressed it theoretically in *The State and Revolution* but also in all his speeches after the 1917 Revolution. Here are just two from the many that Harding quoted in his earlier work

*...Socialism cannot be decreed from above. Its spirit rejects the mechanical bureaucratic approach; living creative socialism is the product of the masses themselves.*

That was in November 1917. In January 1918 at the Third Congress of Soviets he pleaded as follows,

*It is important for us to draw literally all working people into the governments of the state. It is a task of tremendous difficulty. But socialism cannot be implemented by a minority, by the Party. It can be implemented only by tens of millions when they have learned to do it for themselves.*

However in his latest book Harding now comes up with one of his more grotesque misrepresentations of Lenin's views. He does not focus on how Lenin saw the politics of communist society operating. He concludes that Lenin's desire to see the state wither away is in fact a means to create some form of dictatorship.

*The consequent impoverishment of the discourse of politics in the entire career of the Soviet Union was to have grave practical consequences for its citizens and eventually for its own stability. Lenin's own responsibility for these matters is clear and inescapable.*

*Leninism* p.152

How does Harding arrive at this nonsense? First by saying little about Lenin's views in 1917-18. Then he leaps to the end of 1920 when Lenin was surveying the debris of the Russian Revolution when all his earlier hopes had collapsed. In his earlier work Harding had brilliantly demonstrated how Lenin's huge optimism about the capacity of the working class had been driven out by the failure of the world revolution. It was only after 1921 that Lenin began to talk about the Party doing what the class had failed to do. This for us shows that the counter-revolution had succeeded and the Bolshevik Party was to be the instrument of this counter-revolution. It further demonstrates too that Lenin was not

omaiscent. He could not transcend the historical impasse and turn the counter-revolution back. Increasingly he does become impatient with the failings of his comrades and the performance of the Party and the State. But even in his dying days he was still trying to find ways to halt the slide. Here we should also point out that we think that Lenin and the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik) did contribute to the shape of the counter-revolution by some of their mistaken actions but that counter-revolution would still have taken place had they been even more clear than they were in 1917. It was obviously a mistake to create the Council of Peoples Commissars and then get the Soviet to endorse it. This was actually a harking back to bourgeois practices. The executive body of the state already existed in proletarian practice. This was the Executive Committee of the All-Russian Congress of Soviets. This was the body which had been elected by the workers and was overwhelmingly Bolshevik at the end of 1917. What the Bolsheviks did was to create a cabinet and then disguised the fact that these were the old bourgeois ministries. On Trotsky's suggestion the ministers were called "People's Commissars". But the fate of revolutions resides in substance not in names. By having permanent ministries which were not directly under soviet control the Bolsheviks ensured that the Party leadership and the workers' state would become the same thing. The problem was in 1917-19 when the revolution was going forward, when there was life in the soviets, no-one thought to question these institutions.

However Harding wants us to recognise that the capitalist state is the only place where real "democratic" politics can take place so he elevates the issue into one where he can lay the arrival of Stalinism at Lenin's door. It is a more subtle game than the right wing usually play but nevertheless its results are the same. Harding also does not scruple to tell a few lies on the way. He tells us for example that Lenin refused coalition with any other party. This is to repeat one of the lies of the bourgeois Right. In the first place the Council of Peoples Commissars was a coalition which included the Left SRs until they left it in March 1918 (attempting to murder Lenin and Bukharin on the way, they actually did succeed in murdering popular Bolshevik leaders like Uritsky and Volodarsky). Second, Lenin only refused a coalition cooked up by Zinoviev and Kamenev with the Mensheviks and Right SRs where that coalition was to be formed without either Trotsky or Lenin being in the government. Clearly this was simply a reforming of the Provisional Government with the Bolsheviks in the government instead of the bourgeois Kadet party. It would have meant the immediate death of soviet power. And this was the key to Lenin's politics at the time. If a party

recognised soviet power it could fight for power through the soviets but only the Bolsheviks and Left SRs did this. One by one all the other parties walked out of the Soviet Congress (the Menshevik factions kept taking part then walking out depending on the manoeuvrings amongst themselves). It was this that also explains the Bolshevik attitude to the Constituent Assembly.

### The Constituent Assembly

After the fall of the Tsar the calling of a Constituent Assembly was continually postponed by the Provisional Government because they knew that the bourgeoisie would be scarcely represented in it. The Bolsheviks always claimed they were the only party that would actually hold it and this promise they kept. The elections took place only a fortnight after the Bolsheviks took power. The Bolsheviks won a vast majority in the towns whilst the SRs (the peasant party) won a vast majority in the countryside. It has to be remembered that this was not a referendum on the October Revolution since the SR election manifesto did not even mention it and news of the fall of the Provisional Government had not reached many parts of Russia. It also did not take account of the Left SR split from the Right SRs since the Right were massively over-represented (as elections to the peasant soviets only three weeks later demonstrated). The Bolsheviks decided not to call for new elections but did decide to let the Assembly meet. They simply proposed that the Assembly recognise the fact of Soviet power. Only the Bolsheviks and Left SRs voted for the motion so the right SRs then went on to discuss agrarian reform (something they had done nothing to achieve when controlling the Ministry of Agriculture under the Provisional Government). In this totally unreal atmosphere which ended in farce, the Assembly was finally closed and the building was locked up. For the Right (and for Harding) this was Russia's "one day of democracy" but this is to do violence to the fact that soviet power was already in existence. The Constituent Assembly had such little support that attempts by the enemies of soviet power to organise demonstrations in the days after its closure were easily dispersed. The truth of the matter is that soviet power was seen to be more relevant to the working masses than the airy debates of failed SR politicians. The Constituent Assembly issue has been cited as evidence of the dictatorial conduct of Lenin and the Bolsheviks by the enemies of working class revolution ever since. Harding, though more subtle in his line of argument, repeats the same views. In fact it takes the focus away from the real issue of proletarian power the subsequent decline of the soviets but Harding makes it clear that he does not take them very seriously.



## The Parasitism and Decay of Capitalism

There are many other issues which we could take up where Harding tries to show that Lenin was wrong but many are not central to the revolutionary thrust of his ideas in the period 1914-21. Even so one area which is important to revolutionaries today needs some discussion. Harding correctly sees that *Imperialism - the Highest Stage of Capitalism* is central to Lenin's revolutionary ideas after 1916. It was not only his response to the war but also the basis of the internationalism which he bequeathed to us today. Harding has the basic integrity to recognise that this was a revolutionary thrust restored from the trimming and betrayal of the leaders of social democracy. For us, if Lenin had done nothing else it would mark him out as a giant of the working class movement. For Harding though it is another source of weakness. He claims that Lenin was wrong to proclaim that we had now entered the period of the "final decay and parasitism of capital". His answer is an empirical one. The enormous development of capitalism since World War One has shown Lenin to be wrong. But the revolutionary case for seeing the epoch of imperialism as one of decay is not based on the idea that no growth has taken place. But this just shows how ideology mars scientific study. It certainly shows the Professor to be ignorant of what Lenin himself said.

*It would be a mistake to believe that this tendency to decay precludes the rapid growth of capitalism. It does not... On the whole, capitalism is growing more rapidly than before; but this growth is not only becoming more and more uneven in general, its unevenness also manifests itself, in particular in the decay of the countries which are richest in capital (Britain).*

*Imperialism - the Highest Stage of Capitalism* in Selected Works Vol. 1 p.728

What revolutionaries who take their main ideas from Lenin have always said is that the growth of capitalism in its decaying epoch leads to consequences for the working class which are not present in the earlier period of capitalism's growth. Harding seems not to have noticed that more people have been killed in imperialist war this century than in the entire previous history of humanity! He seems to think that the growing poverty of the majority of the world's population is somehow unconnected with the material process of capitalist production itself. The First World War did open up a period of wars and revolutions as Lenin stated. Unfortunately for humanity the working class lost and by the early 1920s the revolutionary wave had

been defeated. Since then the defeats of the working class have multiplied. The counter-revolution spawned all kinds of defeated and anti-working class ideologies like Trotskyism, Stalinism and Maoism who take the mistakes of the past and turn them into virtues. Even those who recognise that the Russian Revolution was the highest expression of working class consciousness hitherto seen in history have, under the weight of bourgeois ideology taken the road to councilism against "Leninism". This means that the scattered forces of the proletarian vanguard spend too much time distancing themselves from the rich experience of October instead of learning from it even though we recognise that a future revolution will not be made precisely in its image.

In order to defend current bourgeois democratic society Harding has to dismiss Lenin's view that we live in the era of the decay of capitalism. His whole argument is based on it. If Harding can successfully assert that capitalism is still progressive then Lenin's case for proletarian revolution is postponed to some unforeseeable future. But this is the epoch of proletarian revolution. Capitalism has exhausted its possibilities as a progressive mode of production. Famine, war and increasing poverty are its offspring. The problem is that a system can be in decay for centuries as long as the exploited, antithetical class does not recognise the need to destroy it. The Roman Empire went through three centuries of gradual decline but the class struggle within it did not lead to the founding of a more progressive social order. Instead it led to the "common ruin of the contending classes" (Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*). Revolution is not a work of individual genius nor a matter of proclamation but the conscious work of millions. Until the working class is more aware of this, is more united and most significantly more organised on an international level the university professors can sleep happily with their theories about the end of the working class and the triumph of capitalist democracy. For our part we are working for the inevitable future revolutionary wave (which will not be soon) and call upon readers and sympathisers to do all they can to strengthen and enrich the development of a genuine international revolutionary movement. Read Harding's book by all means because if you cannot answer it you cannot be theoretically armed for the future, and, as Lenin said, "Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary practice". In this sense we are "Leninist".

Jock

*Leninism* is published by Macmillan at £13.99 paperback



# Sexism, Racism ... Divisions in the Working Class and The Fight For Communism

The following text is the outline of a talk given at a CWO open meeting in Sheffield last July. As such it is not intended to be a definitive political or theoretical statement. It is rather the bare bones of how we think communists today should approach the various forms of prejudice, discrimination and oppression which help to maintain divisions inside the working class.

The meeting was well attended with everyone participating in a lively and thought-provoking debate which developed as the presentation went along. There was apparently no disagreement about its basic premises which meant for a less polemical flavour than at some of our meetings but a more extended discussion. The issues raised ranged from the structure of the future communist society to the internal organisation of the revolutionary party. As usual we would welcome comments and criticisms from any of our readers.

## What is Communism?

It should stand to reason that people belonging to an organisation whose aim is to see the establishment of a communist society should be against every sort of discrimination and oppression of one sector of society by another. However to the wider world this is not always obvious.

Sadly most people identify communism with the old USSR and Stalinism. But communism is not totalitarian state capitalism. It is a world community of 'freely associated producers' where every individual, regardless of gender, race, physical handicap, etc., contributes as far as they are able to production of society's needs as well as in the decision-making process which determines what those needs are and how goods will be allocated.

## The Big Criticism

The big criticism of this is usually along the lines that "You say women's oppression, racism, etc. will disappear come the revolution but meanwhile you're not doing anything to change things now. In fact you're quite happy to forget about the whole problem. In other words, 'you'll get pix in the sky when you die'." (Because people who make this criticism generally don't think there really will be a revolution.)

In part they are right. For historical materialists there is no separate 'woman question' or race problem. We leave it to bourgeois hacks to argue about superiority between the sexes etc.

(There is no pre-ordained form for the organisation of society. For example, historically, or rather prehistorically, there is evidence that women were once predominant in European society whilst the notion that the nuclear family has always been the basis of society is an historical and anthropological absurdity.) It is also true that, because revolutionaries aim to get rid of capitalism rather than waste their time trying to reform it, they do not want to get diverted from this aim by becoming absorbed in 'single issue struggles'. We can return to the question of reformism later. Here let's just say that the era when revolutionaries could imagine that the path to communism was via a series of reforms to capitalism is long over. We should also be clear, however, that what used to be called the 'woman question', and also racism are not single issues (like motorways). Neither are they marginal questions. They are central issues because what we are talking about is the overcoming of divisions in the working class without which the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of a communist society are impossible.

## The Changing Composition of the Workforce

A central part of the marxist vision of revolution is that material circumstances will provide the basis for the development of revolutionary class consciousness, essential to the overthrow of the existing state. However, Marx's contribution to our understanding of how a communist society could really come into existence and not simply remain a millenarian dream of the poor and oppressed went beyond this. According to Marx



the working class is a potentially revolutionary class not because it is the most oppressed or materially impoverished class in history but because it is the most exploited class. (By virtue of the vast amount of wealth workers produce for capital only a small fraction of which is returned to them in the form of wages.) It is workers' collective daily experience of exploitation, combined with their access to the means of production, which Marx argued were the basis for first recognising the necessity to overthrow capitalism and second the practical possibility of doing so. The communist revolution is, of course, a political act and requires a revolutionary political consciousness (not just the idea that workers can take over 'their' industry). In a more general sense, however, the prospect of a communist revolution hinges on those who work for a wage realising that they are strategically in a position to control the whole of society's productive forces. When we look at the structure of the modern labour force it is clear that women **DIRECTLY** play a significant part. They are not a marginal element.

### Women's Growing Role in the Labour Force

In Britain today there are now only 250,000 fewer women than men in the employed workforce.

30% of households now depend on a female wage as their main income. The structure of the capitalist economy has changed and the male breadwinner supporting wife and kids is no longer the norm. This has been replaced by the two income norm.

But while feminists can discuss how far this has

'liberated' women in general, communists have to put this into the wider material context. What is obvious from the statistics is that working class women are being used as the cheapest and most 'flexible' labour power in an increasingly cheapened and exploited labour market.

After more than thirty years of Sex Discrimination and Equal Pay Acts the average female wage is still 30% or so less than the average male. This itself is approximate — for full-time workers some sectors of female employment fare even worse — for example, selling and materials processing [i.e. shop assistants and factory workers]

For part time work the situation is even worse. Only one sector of predominantly female workers (nurses) gets paid more than men by hour. Only two sectors get 24-30% less (clerical and catering/cleaning); the rest are paid less than 30% of male hourly workers. (This relative weight is no better than in the 19th century).

It is well known that female workers make up the majority of part time workers and equally that part time work is on the increase (6 million c.f 4 million in 1981). According to Wil. Hutton 70% of all new part time jobs are for 16 hours or less — i.e. much more precarious, without holiday or sick pay entitlements etc.

The relatively worse position of female workers is undeniable but this should not let us forget that the overall material situation of the working class is deteriorating. Today 21% of the British workforce is now officially economically 'inactive'. A further 8% are officially classified as unemployed and 1% are on training schemes. 1 in 4 male adults of working age are now unemployed. The lowest paid 10% of male real wages are down and pay is increasingly made up with piece work, overtime, etc.

**Table 9: Average Weekly Earnings in Britain by Occupation and Gender, 1990**

Occupational Group	Female £	Male £	Female as % of Male
Clerical & related	182.1	231.60	78.6
Professional & related incl. caring welfare & health	258.00	341.40	75.7
Catering/cleaning/hairdressing etc	144.00	193.00	76.0
Selling	162.80	260.00	68.7
Painting/repentive/assembly etc	154.30	229.00	67.2
Professional & related supporting management & administration	333.60	443.60	75.2
Making & repairing	174.00	241.40	69.9
Managerial/executive mgmt	339.80	445.40	69.4
Professional & related in science etc	249.30	355.00	70.2
Materials processing	151.40	240.10	63.2
Processing etc	163.40	265.70	61.5
Transport operating	163.60	226.40	72.3
Literary/art/sport	268.30	363.10	73.9
Security	268.50	293.60	91.4

**Source:** New Earnings Survey, 1990

### Regardless of Gender, Capitalism Makes Workers Pay for its Economic Crisis

For the majority of working women the issues are not the 'glass ceiling' or the morality of employing nannies and domestic servants, but of basic material survival. When the wages and working conditions of the whole working class are constantly declining as capital tries to get out of its economic crisis there is no point in workers squabbling over who gets what. (This is not to say we are proposing that any set of workers simply accept whatever capital throws at them.) The fact is that there can be no solution to the 'plight' of women workers within the framework of this society or separate from a struggle with their male companions to overthrow it. As Alexandra

Kollontai argued as long ago as 1908:

*We find it difficult to point to even one fact in the history of the struggle of the proletarian women to improve their material conditions to which the general feminist movement has contributed significantly. Whatever the proletarian women have achieved in the sphere of raising their own living standards is the result of the efforts of the working class in general and of themselves in particular. The history of the struggle of the working women for better conditions of labour and for a more decent life is the history of the struggle of the proletariat for its liberation.<sup>3</sup>*

### **The 'Women's Movement': Reflection of Capitalist Change**

In a more general sense too we can see that improvements in women's position have been and are much more a reflection of particular historical circumstances and capital's changing economic needs than achievements by the ephemeral 'women's movement'. This is so, whether we look at the history of women's employment, or that other great liberating feature, the contraceptive pill. For example the mass employment of women in the arms industry during the 1st World War is generally portrayed by feminists as a positive gain for women which is linked to that other supposed political achievement, the right to vote (1918 for women over thirty and remaining non-enfranchised male workers.) From a revolutionary perspective, however, these apparent gains are nothing of the kind. What gain is it for one section of the working class to be employed making weapons so that another section can go off to massacre each other by the million for the sake of capitalist imperialism? Moreover in the context of the revolutionary wave which the experience of the 1st World War eventually inspired women's entrance into the labour force is hardly the overriding issue for the working class. At a time when there was a real possibility of overthrowing capitalism, i.e. the wage slave system, all feminists can see are the issues of equal pay and votes for women. The latter was in fact a conscious reward by the ruling class to the 'women's movement' [the likes of Christabel Pankhurst] for its support of the 'war effort'. It is no accident that Christabel's increasingly revolutionary sister, Sylvia, who worked amongst women in the east End of London, ended up by dropping the demand for the vote altogether as she realised that it was really communist revolution that was on the agenda. This is why she changed the name of her paper from *Women's Dreadnought* to *Workers' Dreadnought* after the Russian Revolution.

Just how useless the vote was to women and

how fleeting the 'gains' is demonstrated by their mass return to 'home and duty' after the war and the introduction of marriage bars (with the co-operation of the unions) in the Thirties. A similar pattern of mass female employment then return to domesticity accompanied the 2nd World War and its immediate aftermath. This was followed by the biggest boom period in capitalism's history and a marked increase in female participation in the workforce as the demand for labour power grew. During this same period the modern women's movement emerged but it was in response to women's changing circumstances not as a determinant of change. As the workplace becomes more gruelling and wage labour a less 'liberating' prospect it comes as no surprise to hear today's feminists openly peddling the old reactionary view that by going out to work (or "developing their career") women have failed to recognise their 'true nature' and should instead concentrate on home-making and child rearing.

Similarly with that other great liberating feature of the Sixties, the contraceptive pill. This was developed by drugs companies searching for a sure source of profits. Clearly its effect on women's lives has been dramatic but again the 'women's movement' was part of that effect not the other way round. In fact the history of contraception cannot be divorced from how the ruling class perceives its needs. Marie Stopes, the first great champion of contraception in Britain, was, like Hitler, a eugenicist and part of the racial purity movement which developed in intellectual and political circles in the early years of the century (including the Fabian Society) when there was a widespread fear for the quality of the racial stock and the weakening of British imperialism. Stopes, for example, was concerned that the working class was 'outbreeding' the middle class and wanted to prevent the degeneration of the race by limiting the reproduction of the working class. Her pessaries and suppositories were marketed under the name *Racial* and the first birth control clinic which she opened in Islington in 1921 was run by *The Society for Constructive Birth Control and Racial Progress*. She was not alone. When the Malthusian League opened its first clinic in the East End of London in 1924 it went under the name of the *Workers Birth Control Group*.

In short, for Marxists and working class women there is no question of deciding whether to be a socialist first or a feminist. As Alexandra Kollontai put it before she became an apologist for Stalinism:

*The feminists seek equality in the framework of the existing class society; in no way do they attack the basis of that society.*

•



### Racism: A Tool of the Ruling Class

Similarly with racism: for communists there is no such thing as a 'race problem' or 'race question' in the biological sense. (It is evidence of the current increasingly reactionary climate that bourgeois scientists are returning to debate the significance of genetic and physical differences.) From the standpoint of historical materialism we can see that the bourgeoisie has always used nationalism and its corollary, racism against the working class. They are part of the ideological armoury of the ruling class, used to undermine the class struggle and emphasise that the interests of the 'nation' come before class. In this the

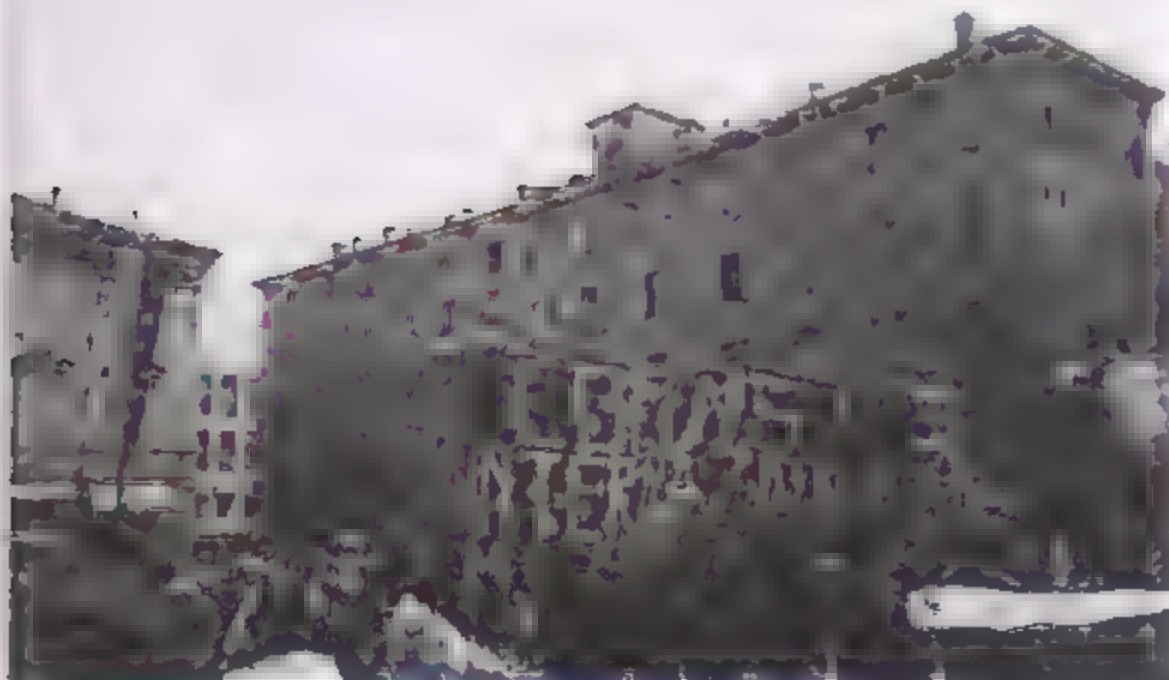
capitalism, not in becoming absorbed in its perpetuation on a 'fairer' or more just basis which anyway is impossible.

Here we have to be very clear about what taking a class point of view means and challenge some common assumptions. First of these is 'multiculturalism'. Under the guise of anti-racism this has been the prime way the state has institutionalised racism and encouraged psychological and physical separateness within the working class. While communists are against all forms of racial discrimination and oppression we should not let propaganda about cultural differences blur the fact that so-called ethnic minorities are divided along class lines. What should be recognised is the essential similarity of interests of workers, whatever their skin colour the propertyless, wage slave against the exploiting class. On one level recognising 'cultural' differences is harmless enough but the underlying assumptions are insidious and perpetuate race barriers. Ultimately their logic is community separatism and often the subjugation of ethnic minority workers to the very reactionary values of officially recognised 'ethnic' 'community leaders', supported by the state and its race relations machine.

Workers of Pakistani origin are represented by Imams and mullahs, Bernie Grant comes out in favour of voluntary repatriation; would-be 'progressives' (often feminists) find themselves supporting separate Islamic schools for girls, staying silent about arranged marriages or even defending them, supporting laws against blasphemy and condoning the most bigotted actions — such as the mosque-orchestrated Bradford burning of Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*. In short, operating a double standard and going along with the bourgeoisie's policy of encouraging and maintaining divisions within the working class.

### Anti-fascism is Not the Answer

From a revolutionary perspective the question is how to overcome racism within the working class in order to encourage solidarity and unity and develop a communist consciousness. The answer by the left is to revive anti-fascism. In the first place the fascism of the 20s and 30s is a spent force. Historically fascism began as a specific response to the threat from a revolutionary workers' movement by the bourgeoisie as a whole.) Today the bourgeoisie in general has no



*Comrades of the Internationalist Communist Party and the Proletarian Struggle Group demonstrating against racist attempts to divide the working class in Parma last Mayday.*

trade unions are as important for the ruling class as any of its agents.

The existence of racist ideas within the working class also makes it easier for capital to divide workers against each other. Like women, migrant workers are used as a source of cheap labour and even blackleg labour. Today, when the economic crisis has created massive unemployment the richer states are trying to stem the flow of migration. At the same time, however, it helps capitalism to have a permanent pool of cheap labour — easily identifiable (skin colour) which can become the brunt of well-orchestrated prejudice and hatred so that when they are unemployed they are not regarded as fellow workers but as illegitimate scroungers, criminals, responsible for low pay etc.

Our aim as communists must be to pose ways of overcoming these divisions in order to help develop a sense of class solidarity. As Marx said, "the proletariat is the negation of all nationality", our interest is in a united fight against

need for a fascist assault on the working class which is already well under control. However, even if there were a real fascist threat the task of communists is not to repeat the tragedy of the Thirties and forget about the struggle for communism in favour of the popular front. The thinking behind this was that class differences should be sunk in favour of a multi-class alliance against the 'bigger danger' of fascism. It was exactly the thinking that allowed the bourgeoisie to mobilise workers for the 2nd global imperialist war. And it is this kind of thinking which the capitalist left uses today to justify the abandoning of working class political activity for alliances with all and sundry (from the TUC to the church and the mosque) ... for what? For tired old anti-fascist campaigns which are really pro-democracy campaigns. Their net effect is to reinforce the existing state and the illusion that democratic capitalism is 'good' capitalism.

Our answer is that wherever communists find themselves they must not be afraid to go against the stream and fight for working class unity and autonomy from capitalism's many organisations for undermining this, not least the unions. Not cultural separatism but black and white workers together against exploitation. (As our comrades in Italy succeeded in doing in a small way recently by organising a demonstration of solidarity of Italian and immigrant workers which ended with singing of the Internationale.)

### Only a Communist Society Can Provide the Basis for Genuine Equality

At the end of the day communists are fighting for a society where everyone is economically secure. This is the only basis for political and 'civil' equality. Everyone will share equally in society's wealth and will participate, not just in the organisation of work but in the running of society. This will be regardless of gender, race, age, disability or whatever. Then the issues will not be about tinkering with rotten old capitalist society, but about how to ensure the best conditions for the full development of every individual. Ignorance and prejudice are not going to disappear overnight but once every member of society is materially secure then there can be meaningful battles in terms of fairness and justice. Eventually there will be completely new living arrangements which will lead to the disappearance of the nuclear family not by state decree against marriage from above but as first legal, then material and psychological bases are removed. The nuclear family, whose prime function under capitalism is to pass on bourgeois property and historically has been imposed on the working class, will disappear as personal relations remain outside the

sphere of legal contracts and children, the sick and aged are cared for by the community as of right. Then the material basis for the emergence of more communal living arrangements will have been established. Meanwhile revolutionaries do not bemoan the collapse of the family and the disintegration of the social fabric as New Labour is doing, but oppose measure like the Child Support Act for what they are - an attempt to cut the state's expenditure and increase the poverty of those whose relationships have broken down. If this is the reality of modern capitalism it is time it was superseded by a more rational society.

### The Communist Organisation

Our aim above all is to develop class consciousness and class solidarity and this cannot be done without addressing the problem of the divisions fostered within the working class by capitalism. We are not idealists and recognise that workers, even revolutionaries, are susceptible to racial prejudice, sexism, etc. While there is no room in a revolutionary organisation for the 'workers and their wives' mentality or racist stereotyping we have to also recognise the difference between token changes in language (political correctness) and genuine attempts to think and act as communists must. The fact that even revolutionary organisations are encumbered by capitalism's ideological dross is no excuse for the organisation as a whole simply mirroring bourgeois ideology. As today's communist organisations develop beyond their present existence on the margins of the working class into a world-wide revolutionary party they will have to take on board these issues. There is no question that the internal life of that party will need to reflect the fact that we are struggling for a new society where everyone participates to the full extent of their ability, regardless of age, gender, race, religion, nationality, colour, or whatever other characteristic may be conjured up to divide the working class. ER

1. From tables published in *New Earnings Survey* 1990.

2. In *The Guardian* 12.6.96

3. From 'The Social Basis of the Woman Question' in *Alexandra Kollontai, Selected Writings*, Allison and Busby, 1977 p. 62





# Readers' Letters

## An American Nightmare

Comrades

I am writing to you from Wisconsin, where I have accessed your home page. I am greatly impressed by this, yet I find myself wishing I read Italian. The quality of your writing far surpasses that of the ICC. The last article of theirs that I read claims that they've been infiltrated by freemasons. It seems as if someone is purposely trying to make them look ridiculous...

One of the problems that I see is that people have become resigned to their fates. The left in this country plays the same role as the left in Britain, the substance of their message being that only by voting and participating in unions is there any way forward. The media just bombards us with the worst sort of poison, yet it seems to demoralize those people who are most conscious. Here in the best possible of all worlds the ruling class turns everything into a moral issue. Recently I heard on the BBC radio that the state of Idaho has made fornication between unmarried couples illegal yet no word of this has reached the press here. The government in Washington continues its offensive against Iraq and their press speaks of Saddam as if he were a naughty boy. I would like to see your publications address this latest imperialist offensive, there is nothing positive happening here. I have participated in one illegal workplace action where myself and five fellow workers fought a multimillionaire property management company owner, winning a fifty cent an hour raise and catastrophic health insurance. I then took a job as a janitor in the state employees union where I unsuccessfully agitated fellow

workers to take independent action against both the union bosses and the state itself.

Revolutionary Greetings from the belly of the beast  
A.

## A Revolutionary Vision

Dear Comrade

First thanks for your support. Such statements encourage revolutionary activity and help us know what kind of an impact we are making. We would encourage all our readers to send us more responses.

We are glad that you like our writing. We agree that it is a tragedy that the ICC has become bound up with its internal problems sometimes devoting 5 out of 8 pages in their press to it (which as usual they dub the problem of the whole "milieu"). Despite this there are some serious articles in the ICC press. For example, the current *World Revolution* has a considered response to our criticism of their denunciations of the French strikes of last year (even if we think they missed the main point). Their *International Review* has also been running a stimulating series of articles by C.D. Ward on the development of the idea of communism. The last one even expressed solidarity with our defence of Engels as a revolutionary in RPI. On the issues which divide us from the ICC, we have been promising an article for some time. As we will be responding in our next *Internationalist Communist* we will say no more here.

We hope the article on *Imperialism* in this issue helps answer your request for us to deal with the Iraq

issue which, as we show, cannot be seen in isolation from the other imperialist conflicts

The rest of your letter is testimony to the difficult times we live in. However, the anger of the class is growing globally (according to all the bits of letters and articles we get from correspondents). There is as yet no dramatic expressions of this anger but there is a growing network of individuals who as yet have not yet realised their ability to act because they have made few attempts to formally link themselves to organised activity. As we wrote in our last issue (see *The Difficult Path to the Revival of Working Class Struggle*) the next revolutionary wave will be international or it will not be revolutionary. This means we need to have built in advance an organised and centralised party to coordinate the scattered efforts of revolutionaries everywhere. We have had a lot of correspondence from individuals around the USA in the past few months and we hope some time in the not-to-distant future to assist these comrades further to clarify the nature of

## To our Readers

We have always maintained that a dialogue with readers is essential for the development of revolutionary theory. As can be seen from this issue our e-mail correspondence is bearing fruit. However we have had many more messages on the e mail which we cannot publish because they simply offer single sentences of encouragement or are clearly intended as personal exchanges. We urge all our readers to keep up the correspondence and to keep it clear!

In the meantime this publication takes a large number of our resources to produce and we ask readers to support us financially. Why not take out a supporters sub?

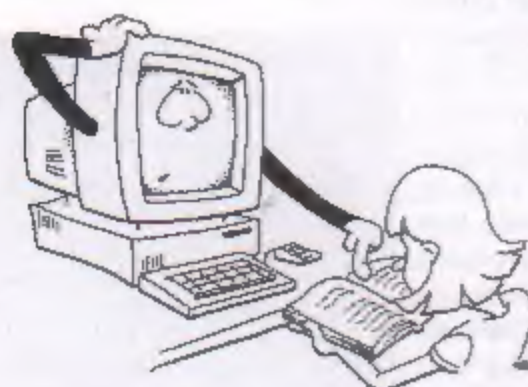


revolutionary politics. In the meantime the most committed of these are the comrades around *Los Angeles Workers Voice* (see leaflet in this issue). We have not yet had systematic discussions with them but they have announced their support for the Communist Left in general and advertised our press but we would hope that they develop, with others, to become an American arm of an international proletarian party. You should get in correspondence with them.

The revolution is not around the corner but the very nature of capitalist contradictions make another revolutionary attempt by the world working class inevitable. This attempt is not guaranteed to succeed but it certainly won't if we let the current capitalist domination demoralise those who are already conscious.

Keep on struggling. We hope to hear more from you soon

CWO



Party (*Battaglia Comunista*) in Italian and some French texts from our bulletin *Bureau-inform*. There is also a welcome page for the IBRP listing all our current publications as well as the full text of the Bureau Platform which currently appears in our two main languages but others are being prepared. The articles from the current issues of our main publications, *Battaglia Comunista*, *Prometeo*, *Revolutionary Perspectives* and *Internationalist Communist* are all available and these will be constantly up-dated, as well as the latest leaflets and Bureau statements. The form of page will change as readers request. A further site is also being developed in Italy which will include historical documents of the Italian Left. This address will be available shortly and will be published in our next edition of *Revolutionary Perspectives*. Internet users wishing to contact us by e-mail should write to our postbox for an e-mail address of one of our comrades who has taken responsibility for this work.

## Our Basic Positions

1. We aim to become part of the future world working class party which will guide the class struggle towards the establishment of a stateless, classless, moneyless society without exploitation, national frontiers or standing armies and in which *the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all* (Marx): COMMUNISM.

2. Such a society will need a revolutionary state for its introduction. This state will be run by workers' councils, consisting of instantly recallable delegates from every section of the working class. Their rule is called the dictatorship of the proletariat because it cannot exist without the forcible overthrow and keeping down of the capitalist class worldwide.

3. The first stage in this is the political organisation of class-conscious workers and their eventual union into an international political party for the

promotion of world revolution.

4. The Russian October Revolution of 1917 remains a brilliant inspiration for us. It showed that workers could overthrow the capitalist class. Only the isolation and decimation of the Russian working class destroyed their revolutionary vision of 1917. What was set up in Russia in the 1920's and after was not communism but centrally planned state capitalism. There have as yet been no communist societies anywhere in the world.

5. The International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party was founded by the heirs of the Italian Left who tried to fight the political degeneration of the Russian Revolution and the Comintern in the 1920's. We are continuing the task which the Russian Revolution promised but failed to achieve - the freeing of the workers of the world and the establishment of communism. Join us!

## Find Us on the Internet

<http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/3303>

The above is the address of the Homepage of the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party. Readers with access to the Internet can read the main documents of the Communist Workers' Organisation in English, those of the Internationalist Communist



# Internationalist Communist

*Review of the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party*

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